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BINATIONAL COOPERATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL ELL IMMIGRANT STUDENTS: THE LUCHA PROGRAM AT UT AUSTIN

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by

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Dedication

A mis hijos que son mi inspiración.

A mis nietos que son el motivo de mi investigación.

A mis padres que han sabido ser un modelo a seguir.

A mi gran familia a la que tengo orgullo de pertenecer.

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BINATIONAL COOPERATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL ELL IMMIGRANT STUDENTS: THE LUCHA PROGRAM AT UT AUSTIN

Beatriz Irene Gutiérrez-González, PhD

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a qualitative case study of a program where binational program established by the University of Texas to lower the Hispanic high school dropout rate in the United States. The Language Learners at the University of Texas at Austin Center for Hispanic Achievement (LUCHA) program is the focus of this dissertation. The LUCHA program serves immigrant Hispanic students who account for 34% of the 45% Hispanic dropout rate reported by NCES. The theoretical framework employed included the theories of cultural and social capital and the theory of caring to answer the following questions: 1) What challenges had to be met in order to initiate and develop the LUCHA program, a binational education program to combat the high dropout rate among Latino immigrants?, and 2) What can be learned from the implementation and practice of the LUCHA program in school districts with almost identical, homogenous population, and different levels of success with the program. Data was collected in Mexico and the United States and included participants involved in the program at different levels ranging form political involvement in Mexico to immigrant students in South Texas Valley school districts where the program

started operations in 2006. The researcher was a participant in this study. The innovative ideas developed and instituted to reduce the Hispanic dropout rate included equipping schools with essential/core and English as a Second Language courses produced in Mexico, validating prior high school credits students had from Mexico through a transcript analysis service, obtaining Mexican transcripts for immigrant students who could not deliver them to schools, and diagnostic tests produced in Mexico for immigrant students with interrupted schooling. These services and their delivery were modified and adapted to meet the changing needs and graduation requirements of students and the educational bureaucracy in the U.S. This study brings to light the skills sets, assumptions, and characteristics of people needed to create binational agreements of cooperation. This research suggests that the perception of caring (Noddings, 1984) of educational agents in schools and school districts influences the level of success of the program in schools with almost identical populations.

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Chapter 1: *Introduction*

"We are joined by a border, but our bonds are so much more than that. All across America, all across the United States we have benefited from the culture, the language, the food, the insights, the literature, the energy, the ambitions of people who have migrated from our southern neighbor."
Barak Obama, U.S. President, Reuters, April 16, 2009

"Mi gobierno insistirá y trabajará con el nuevo gobierno estadounidense en la protección de los derechos de los migrantes".
"La prosperidad no puede ser alcanzada a menos de que se trabaje sobre la base de la igualdad, el respeto recíproco y la cooperación".
Felipe Calderón, Presidente de México, CNN en Español online.15 de Abril de 2009.

This dissertation investigates the Language Learners at the University of Texas at Austin Center for Hispanic Achievement (LUCHA) program [1] (www.utk16.org). The program, housed in the K-16 Education Center within the Division of Continuing Education at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) first opened during the academic year 2006-07. Created in the midst of contentious national debate in the U.S on immigration policy, LUCHA is a binational effort to reduce high school dropout rates particularly among the Mexican immigrant population. It seeks to improve immigrants' high school educational opportunities for success in Texas independent school districts through partnerships with

[1] In this study, I use the term Hispanic to refer to individuals of Hispanic descent regardless of race who can trace their origins to Mexico, other Latin American countries, or Spain (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The term "Mexican" is applied to Mexican nationals and first-generation Mexican immigrants. "Mexican-American" refers to second generation individuals of Mexican descent in the United States (U.S.) as well as students born in Mexico that identify themselves as Mexican-American and settled in the U.S. at an early age and/or have strongly acculturated to their host country. I hereby acknowledge that the term Hispanic is not the term of choice for many that feel the term has been imposed by government agencies and prefer to use the term Latino to identify themselves. Nevertheless, throughout this study, I use the term in accordance with the LUCHA program, focus of this dissertation, which stands for Language Learners at The University of Texas at Austin Center for Hispanic Achievement.

Mexican agencies, including Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Ministry of Education.

Specifically, this investigation seeks to study the history, emergence, development and maintenance of an educational program that operates through ongoing and evolving binational cooperation between Mexico and the U.S., serving English language learners, mainly of Mexican descent in high schools in Texas. To this end, the study takes place in three main locations: Mexico, the South Texas Valley, and The University of Texas where the program started. Employing a theoretical framework that includes the theories of Social and Cultural Capital and the Theory of Ethics of Care, the study answers the research questions presented in this chapter.

The over-arching question that guides this case study comes out of scholarship which points to the need for binational solutions that meet the needs of people displaced by economic crises in their own countries (Pastor, 2001a, 2006; Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, 2005; M. Suárez-Orozco & C. Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

To this end, I employ a body of literature with particular focus on the theories of social capital, cultural capital and the theory of caring (Bourdieu & Jean-Claude, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Noddings, 1984). I further direct attention to bilingual education and the Hispanic dropout crisis in the U.S. school system, which is the focus of the LUCHA program studied in this dissertation. I examine U.S.-Mexico relations with respect to their impact on education across borders with a contemporary historical perspective to better understand the creation and development of the LUCHA program.

As a bilingual and bicultural individual with family and scholarly activity along the 'bridge' from Monterrey, Mexico to Austin, Texas, I am particularly interested in binational cooperation in the educational arena of neighboring countries with a history of interdependence. I hope to discover what is needed to create and maintain partnerships in education between two countries with a mobile population that traverses their border. To this end, the LUCHA program, a unique initiative from The University of Texas to lower the dropout rate of Hispanic high school students, which has a direct impact on Mexican immigrant youth is my perfect subject.

In this introductory chapter, I start by defining key terms I employ in this dissertation. I then provide a rationale and introduce the research questions that guide this study. I further include the methods and theoretical framework and address the contributions to the field of my dissertation.

Key Terms

Before elaborating on the rationale, theoretical framework, research questions, and contributions that my study makes, I first need to define key terms that are germane to this account. Namely, my key terms are "transnational," "transnational education," "dropout," and "binational."

Transnational

The term "transnational" in this study takes the meaning conveyed by Faist (2000, pp. 7-8). He explains that transnational social spaces, transnational social fields or transnationalism usually refer to sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across borders of two or more nation-states; ties range from little to highly

institutionalized forms. Portes (2007) defines the term through transnational migration saying "this massive displacement is not one-way, but… it plays back, with rising force, becoming an important factor in the development of sending nations and regions." Many transmigrants or transnationals become deeply rooted in their new country but maintain multiple linkages to their homeland (Schiller, Basch, & Cristina Szanton, 1995). Petrón (2003) states that transnationals are "those individuals who have considerable life experiences on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border." She refers to transnationalism as a state of mind; "a unique state of consciousness that allows one to operate within and between different national, linguistic, and cultural borders without being subsumed by any of them" (p. 6). She notes the distinction between the terms "transnational" and "binational" explaining that *trans-* implies both a sense of movement and unity among parts and that *bi-* suggests a dichotomy. In turn, identity formation when transnationalism is present is shaped by the interconnection of multiple social influences in two countries, and cultures. Immigrants, as much as transnationals, develop a sense of belonging to two places (González Gutiérrez, 2006). For transnational students, identity formation is impacted by the stresses of migration, separations and reunifications, changing networks of relations, cultural hybridization, and often by poverty and segregation (Dietz, 2004; C. Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003).

Transnational Education

Transnational education usually refers to "higher education activities (such as programs, or sets of courses of study, or educational services, including distance education) in which the learners are located in a host country different from the one

where the awarding institution is based; such programs may belong to the education systems of a State other than the host country or may operate outside of any national education system" (Machado dos Santos, 2000). In this research, the term "transnational education" will not be applied to higher education**.** Transnational education implies crossing the borders of national education systems and usually falls into the category of non-official education in the host country. Transnational education is often considered in relation to the franchising of institutions and programs, but it can also take other forms of delivery (Machado dos Santos, 2000).

Dropout

There are several definitions of the term dropout, which in Spanish is *deserción escolar*. In this dissertation, there will be reference to the Texas Education Agency definition of "dropout" as well as the generic understanding of a dropout as "one who quits school" ("The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language ", 1992). In 2003 the Texas Legislature amended the Texas Education Code to define dropouts for state accountability, establishing the definition of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as official for the state. According to the 2009 Accountability Manual issued by the TEA (Texas Education Agency, May 2009), a dropout is a student who was enrolled in the academic year in a Texas public school in grades 7 - 13, but did not return to a Texas public school the following fall within the school-start window, was not expelled, did not graduate, receive a GED, continue high school outside the Texas public school system, begin college, or die.

Binational

This is a term that is an adjective and refers to something that is of two nations. It is included in this 'definition of terms' section because Spell Check and other arbiters of "correct English usage" insist that it should be spelled with the prefix "bi" followed by a dash followed by the word "national." I reject this configuration of the word, as I believe that it is a complete word on its own which means 'of two nations' and will soon take its rightful place with the words 'international' and 'multinational' in the world of 'regular words.'

Rationale

The need to improve education proficiency and have Mexican heritage teens remain in high school until they graduate is a critical challenge for both U.S. and Mexico. The Mexican government acknowledges responsibility for all Mexicans abroad. As Graciela Orozco, *Directora del Departamento de Cooperación para América del Norte de la SEP* (Director of SEP Department of Cooperation with North America) said, "The most urgent request made to the Mexican government from the Mexican and Mexican American population in the United States is that it provide support for educational initiatives that are carried out in the United States" (Gutiérrez, 2008). In the U.S., the Mexican heritage students are the largest group within the Hispanic population and their dropout rate is higher than the other major ethnic groups in the nation –the Hispanic dropout rate of the population between 16 and 24 is 45 percent, 11 percent are native born and 34 percent are foreign born (NCES, 2009). (See Figure 1 below) This has drawn

attention and resources from all sectors affected to try to ameliorate this situation. My research suggests that binational cooperation is part of the solution to this problem.

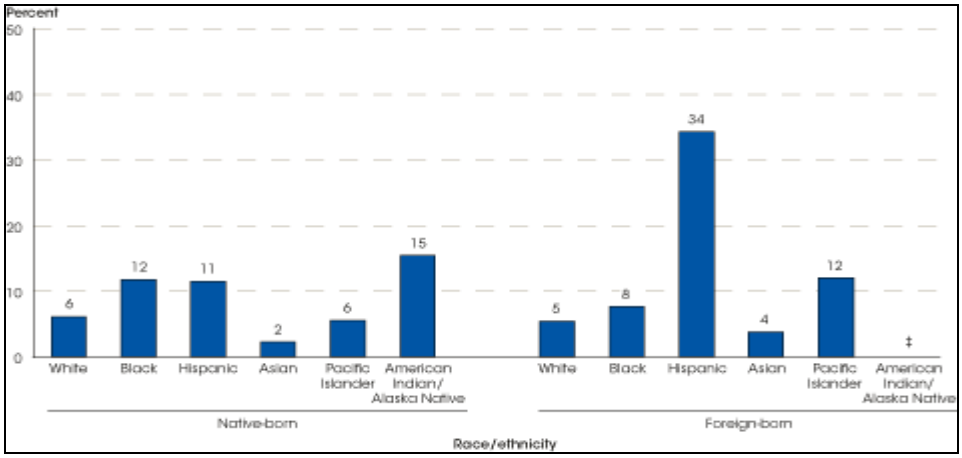


Figure 1. U. S. 2007 status dropout rate by ethnicity of native born and foreign born individuals 16 through 24 years old
Source: (NCES, 2009)

U.S. public schools have alarmingly low high school completion rates. Hispanics are particularly affected as they are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. school-age population who manifest low levels of college readiness, enrollment, and completion. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2007, U.S. public schools served over 53 million students; some 20.4 percent (or 10.8 million) spoke a language other than English at home and five percent (or 2.7 million) spoke English with difficulty. Seventy-five percent of those who spoke English with difficulty spoke Spanish (Planty, 2009). In Texas, Hispanics now constitute nearly half of all the students in public schools and the growth of ELL students is phenomenal. In a telephone conversation with Georgina Gonzalez, Director of Bilingual Education at the Texas Education Agency, on November 25, 2008, she stated that in 2008 there were 775,645 ELL students in Texas, 92% of which were Spanish speakers. Unfortunately, few initiatives at the state or national level

take advantage of Mexico's geographic proximity to create cooperative partnerships to address the needs of a shared student community. Ironically, the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2006) has a partnership with far off Spain to bring bilingual teachers to serve the many Mexican heritage students in Texas schools.

This means that the task of improving Hispanic academic achievement is left to each school district, some of which individually seek help from Mexican institutions and fill their high-attrition bilingual teacher positions with Mexican hires in an ad hoc manner. For example, the Houston Independent School District hires professionals in Mexico through a teacher certification program with the *Universidad Regiomontana* in Nuevo León, México. Mexican hires, offered one-to-three year contracts with the district, teach Spanish and bilingual students from K-12. The same approach is taken by other U.S. school districts in cooperation with other Mexican universities.

Despite the fact that our bordering nations share a student community that is increasingly transnational, there is no other program as large as LUCHA that is as vital and carries the endorsement of the Mexican government (Calderón, 1996; Petrón, 2003; Zuñiga, 2000; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2004). Transnational students are a segment of a massively displaced community that acts economically, politically, culturally, and socially across the boundaries of nation states, such as between U.S. and Mexico (Goldring, 2002; Portes et al., 2007).

Research Questions

This study addresses how the "Language Learners at the University of Texas at Austin Center for Hispanic Achievement (LUCHA) program" works on both sides of the

U.S.-Mexico border to meet the challenges that must be addressed in order to expand opportunities for Mexican immigrant youth. My ultimate goal is to suggest the skill sets, assumptions, and knowledge that are necessary in this new, emerging world of binational and international cooperation in the educational arena and to analyze what is needed to create and maintain partnerships in education between Mexico and the United States. Accordingly, my study questions capture my core interests in the history, creation, development, implementation and practice of the LUCHA program on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border as follows:

> 1. What challenges had to be met in order to initiate and develop the LUCHA program, a binational education program to combat the high dropout rate among Latino immigrants?
>
> 2. What can be learned from the implementation and practice of the LUCHA program in school districts with almost identical, homogeneous populations, and different levels of success with the program?

Method

This dissertation employed a qualitative case study research model in order to gain knowledge and information on educational centers with binational programs to lower immigrant dropout rates. The study had participants residing in both Mexico and the U.S., who were involved in the program at different levels ranging from political involvement like the Minister Carlos González Gutiérrez to program beneficiaries like immigrant students.

My involvement with the program for the past three years provided me with insights as a participant observer during the data collection process. I wrote copious field

and research notes. Additionally, I conducted interviews in Mexico and the U.S. in both Spanish and English. I further collected other forms of documentary data like pamphlets, videos, presentations, and news articles, and obtained historical data on Mexican-U.S. cooperation initiatives in education. Data was analyzed throughout the life of the study, as different events and projects took place, observations and interviews occurred, and as further clarification was needed from the participants. The data collection provided information for a descriptive narrative of the history, creation, development and maintenance of the LUCHA program.

Theoretical Framework

The complexity of the phenomena that preceded and established the layout to put the LUCHA program into practice led me to select a qualitative research framework employing historical and ethnographic research methods.

I perceived what appeared to be a lack of theoretical development with respect to binational institution-building processes in the area of education that reaches not only bilateral agreements on education but impacts students' education at school level. My experience and observation of the facts suggest that relations between Mexico and the U.S. cannot be fully explained with one or two theories. After several months of exposure to the program as a staff member, I found that a comprehensive study of the LUCHA program could better be done using theories that explain the actions of the people involved in it. To this end, I use the following theories: social capital, cultural capital, and the theory of caring.

My research reflects my core interests in the history, creation, development and practice of the LUCHA program. I analyzed my data and in true qualitative research style, not only identified relevant themes as they emerged from the data, but also changed my research questions as they revealed themselves through my studies and experience. For example, I investigated similarities across Mexican and Mexican American cultural contexts—including trusting relations, facility with the Spanish language, an empathic view toward immigrants, and shared cultural understandings and frames of reference on both the U.S. and Mexican sides—could play a powerful mediating role in the creation, on-going development, and maintenance of a complex set of relationships.

Contributions to the Field

My study investigates a unprecedented collaborative effort between two nations, motivated by the need to address a growing and critical problem –the dropout crisis among transnational, immigrant youth in the U.S.[2] This study offers new knowledge pertaining to institutionalized agreements of cooperation between a first and a third world country with distinctive schooling, linguistic, and cultural contexts, while contributing generally to burgeoning scholarship in the areas of immigrant education (Portes et al., 2007; M. Suárez-Orozco & C. Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Valenzuela, Prieto, & Hamilton, 2007).

In a unique contribution to transnational scholarship, my study re-casts globalization in terms of the successful leveraging of a tier-one university in the U.S.

[2] Nearly 40 percent of immigrant Mexican 16-to-19-year-olds are dropouts, while the dropout rate for Mexican immigrant educated in U.S. schools is 20 percent (Fry, 2003). Consistently with these numbers, Hirshman (2001) reports that 40 percent of Mexican immigrant adolescents do not enroll in school. No data is found on transnational Mexican students dropouts.

acquiring franchised, internet-based education from a third-world country. It thus sheds light on the utility and prospects of transborder projects together with implications for what appears to be a prodigious frontier for international policy formation and programmatic development.

I also went from the theoretical to the practical nuts and bolts of what is needed to make the dream of achievement and success for immigrant Mexican high school students into a reality. I look at the way the program was carried out in four school districts in South Texas with an eye on specific situations and attitudes that proved to be productive and those that did not.

A clear advantage for this study is the fact that as a researcher, I am bilingual, bicultural, and transnational. My upbringing took place in the large, urban, northeastern Mexican city of Monterrey, where I earned a master's degree in Education. I furthered my graduate studies at the University of Texas Pan-American situated in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, a large border community. The blending and personal knowledge of the Mexican and North American cultures give me an insider perspective when analyzing the research data. This position allows me access to information that is otherwise unattainable to the casual, especially mono-cultural, observer. Years of experience in the educational field in both countries provide a vital perspective in the analysis and interpretation of the data that were gathered for this study. For these reasons, the position of the researcher within and without the context and scope of qualitative and quantitative research executed for this dissertation, suggests a possibility of synergistic praxis which,

itself contributes to an expanded notion of funds of knowledge that benefit academia and in turn, our Latino students on both sides of our shifting border.

Chapter 2: *Review of Literature*

In order to investigate and analyze the complexities and implications of a high school dropout prevention program for Hispanic students in the U.S. that is endorsed by official Mexican agencies as well as a tier-one university in the U.S., I employ an extensive, interdisciplinary body of literature that examines topics relevant to this research. Starting from the global trends and the need of agreements for global regional strength to the social impacts that follow affecting school age immigrants, I further direct the attention to bilingual education and the Hispanic dropout crisis in the U.S. school system, which is the focus of the LUCHA program studied in this dissertation. I center my literature review on U.S.-Mexico relations and their impact on education across borders. I also use an historical perspective to better understand the creation and development of the LUCHA program.

My literature review includes: a) challenges of binational cooperation; b) transnationalization and binational agreements of cooperation, c) bilingual and immigrant education, and d) serving immigrant youth educational needs and the Hispanic dropout crisis.

Interdisciplinary Body of Literature

a) Challenges of binational cooperation

Binational cooperation efforts take place when there is a need for them to occur. Contrary to some authors (Gilpin & Gilpin, 2003) who suggest that the extent and

significance of economic globalization is greatly exaggerated and misunderstood, I take a cultural-socio-historical approach toward current global issues and highlight the vital importance of binational cooperation in the creation and implementation of education initiatives pertinent to both countries (Robertson, Bonal, & Dale, 2002). This position is shaped by a perspective that allows me to see that events do not transpire in isolation, but rather as effects of prior events (Crotty, 2003).

The economic interdependence of countries produces social change. To explain global interdependence, Waters (2001) identifies three different social arenas of globalization in his analysis: economy, polity, and culture. Worldwide digital communications and international marketing have eased the dissemination and transfer of information and have also sped up the appropriation of distinct characteristics of foreign cultures. Even though the expansion of culture is faster, it is primarily trade that drives globalization (Waters, 2001).

Throughout history, there have been periods of mass migration associated with international trade with a tendency to have a greater movement of people from low income to higher income societies than the other way around. Migrant labor, if it is considered a factor of exchange, is the least globalized while financial trade is the most globalized (O'Rourke & Williamson, 1999; Pastor, 2001a; Portes & Rumbaut, 1997; Waters, 2001). World trade implies a division of labor between societies, classically seen as the division of labor between colonialism and imperialism, where some countries specialized in services and other in production. A binary division of a partly globalized world is typically characterized as developed/underdeveloped, modern/traditional,

industrialized/industrializing, more developed/less developed, first world/third world, North/South or simply rich/poor.

With globalization and the fact that there is a need for a category in between the two extremes of a binary division, a theory of worlds systems was developed. This system divides countries into three rather than two categories – the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery (Kaplan, Wheeler, & Holloway, 2004). In this theory, the semi-periphery acts as a political and economic buffer between the low-income and the high-income countries. The semi-periphery countries, for example, Mexico, are industrializing, mostly capitalist countries in the process of transforming themselves. They are representatives of the in-between category and lack the power and the economic dominance of core nations. Additionally, these countries still have a lot of poverty to manage.

Issues of power have always been present in relations among countries (Ayres, 2004; Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002). The U.S.-Mexico relationship is no exception, made only more evident with the trade problems that have resulted from Mexico imposing import quotas on products coming from the U.S. after a breach of international agreements under NAFTA with a truck ban to Mexican trucks in the U.S. (Griswold, 2001).

Migration from developing to developed countries is stirred by rising income gaps between border economies (Cortés, 2000; Eder, 2001; Zúñiga, 1998). The U.S.-Mexico border has a history of family relationships across borders. Members of extended Mexican families were settled on both sides of the new Mexico-U.S. border of 1848.

There was relatively free movement of people across the border during the 19th and early 20th centuries; it was not until the border became regulated that family members were separated by a place that required government permits to cross. Besides the family relations that generally move towards reunification, economic pulls have determined the flow of migration in the U.S.-Mexico border in the span of seven generations (Romo, 2005).

Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1992, markets, goods and technology move more freely across Mexico, the U.S. and Canada. The same freedom does not exist for immigrants. Despite a massive buildup of enforcement resources along the border, unprecedented recent mass immigration from Mexico to the U.S. has taken place. This is due mainly to social and economic pressures, as well as the fear and uncertainty due to escalating drug crime and kidnapping activities in Mexico. To many in the U.S., the number of Mexican immigrants both legally documented and undocumented, is perceived as a threat and has stirred anti-immigrant sentiments reflected in policies that affect immigrants' wellbeing (Massey et al., 2002; Pastor, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 1997). The Mexican immigrant flow back and forth to Mexico slowed because of developments in U.S. immigration policy, which resulted in greater numbers of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. who had to accept increasingly expensive and dangerous circumstances in order to come to the U.S. in search of work as well as an equally unsafe trip back home.

Fearing the loss of national identity and fueled by perceived threats of terrorism exacerbated by 'foreigners', policies like Sensenbrenner's Immigration Enforcement

(Sensebrenner, 2006) in January 2006 provoked intense responses on both sides of the border. Mass marches took place in many parts of the U.S. in May 2006. Conservative policies such as this one and political responses at that time were at cross purposes with the need of modern capitalism for global regional strength, which takes the form of treaties among countries like NAFTA (Pastor, 2001a; Stiglitz, 2003; Waters, 2001).

With NAFTA, trade among the three countries helped increase the GDP, but the change in relative volume of GDP per capita between the 2007 and 1994 (year NAFTA was implemented) for Mexico (8.4) and the U.S. (34.7) leaves a 26.3 gap between the two bordering countries (OECD, 2009). The income gap increased between the United States ($45,489) and Mexico ($14,004), together with unemployment and economic downturns which included the peso crisis of 1994-95, and, more currently, the 35% devaluation of the Mexican peso in 2008-09, the main stimulus for a mass migration from Mexico into the U.S. NAFTA made no provisions to cushion economic downturns in Mexico and the country could not solve the problem alone (Ayres, 2004; Pastor, 2006). International economic strategies seem to be failing the poor who migrate at the mercy of economic forces in their need to survive (Bacon, 2004; Stiglitz, 2003). Families dismember with the income earners leaving the home country first, struggling later to reunite family members in the host country.

According to Pastor (2001a, 2001b, 2004, 2006), the proponents of NAFTA argued that free trade would reduce the flow of migration but the opposite is true. The developmental strategy in the region encourages foreign investment near the border and attracts labor migration the south of Mexico to the border. People migrate to the U.S. not

because they lack jobs but because they seek higher wages across the border. International policies could reverse the trend of immigration to the U.S. by developing strategies to reduce the income gap between Mexico and the U.S.

Asserting that no two nations are as important to the United States as Canada and Mexico, Pastor (2008) is a strong proponent for the creation of a true North American Community. He argues that the most pressing problems in the region—including immigration, security, and declining competitiveness can be reduced if all three sovereign countries form a community where they benefit when the other make progress, and all suffer when one fails. He makes a sharp distinction between the premises that stand for a North American Community and a North American Union, which he has been accused of promoting. A Union –like the United States – is a merger of states into a unified central government, while a Community is composed of three sovereign governments that seek to strengthen bonds of cooperation. He explains that each government retains the power to decide whether and how to cooperate according to their constitutional procedures. Canada and Mexico are the two largest sources of energy imports for the U.S., and its trade and investment has nearly tripled after NAFTA was signed. The U.S. exports to Mexico and Canada nearly twice the amount it does to the whole European Union. Today, one fourth of the nearly 500 million border crossings a year registered in the U.S. borders come from Mexico. Undocumented immigration has increased and if anything, NAFTA has inadvertently fueled immigration.

Mexican mass immigration has polarized public opinion, particularly when people perceive immigration patterns as a threat to national sovereignty and identity (Cornelius,

2005). The unprecedented massive marches against anti-immigrant policies reinforced polar opinions. In the media, people are constantly exposed to immigration news and opinions for and against immigrants (Carcamo, 2009; Holguin, 2002). Adding to the notion that "the American economy absolutely needs immigrants," as Andrew Sum, director of the labor market center told the Washington Post (Holguin, 2002), Lovato (2006) mentions in one of his articles that immigrants "represent fluidity and change." He notes that immigrants move and relocate as a reflection of global processes "unleashed by big capital." He further draws attention to progressive or liberal individuals who are in favor of immigrations but who cannot embrace the *movimiento* because they do not see it as an extension of the Midwestern immigrant history. Other authors (Gingrich, 1995; Levitt, 1983; Limbaugh, 2004) write openly against immigrants making a distinction between the undocumented 'and unwanted' immigrant criminalizing their status and blaming them for the economic downturns in the U.S. This perspective has spilled over into attitudes about educating immigrant children in public schools, which makes the LUCHA program even more remarkable, on the one hand, and critical, on the other. That is, programs like LUCHA become much more important to children and youth who may get increasingly constructed in such contexts as members of pariah communities.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, coupled with both the consequent militarization of the southern U.S. border, and the earlier Mexican economic crises after NAFTA came into effect (Pastor, 2001a), have forced Mexican migrant workers to either stay longer than they had initially anticipated or settle permanently in the United States to recoup the cost of entry (Cornelius, 2005; Massey, 2005; Massey et al., 2002). In

numerous instances, they also brought their families along with hopes of maintaining family unity and providing educational opportunities for their children (Parrini, Parins, Kittlaus, Bliss, & American Bar Association, 2001). Ironically and in contrast to the ebb and flow of pre-9/11 immigrants, the consequence of the increased presence and power of anti-terrorist governmental entities, particularly the Department of Homeland Security, is that many immigrants are actually less likely to return to Mexico or Latin America today than previously, due to both law enforcement and conservative policies. It is the downturn of the U.S. economy caused primarily by the subprime mortgage crises in 2008 and the consequent lack of employment opportunities in the U.S. that forced thousands of Mexican immigrants to return to Mexico voluntarily. Currently in 2009, the shift of migration is placing the U.S. as a target destination once more. Mexicans from all sectors of society see migration to the U.S. as a way to ameliorate the effects of the global economic downturn initiated with the U.S. market crises and the increase of social insecurity in Mexico.

The burgeoning Hispanic student populations have had, for the most part, a very unsuccessful and uncomfortable experience with the United States public education system. Poorly designed and ill-equipped programs that are connected to federal education policies that are not suited to meet the diverse needs of the growing population have created a situation which Ruiz de Velasco (2005) characterizes as "from equal access to performance outcomes." He explains that English Language Learners (ELLs), in particular, suffer the consequences of an educational system which has not sufficiently studied their learning needs or their learning resources. He states that furthermore, there

are not enough well-prepared teachers and other staff to meet the needs of these students (AFT Teachers, July, 2006).

b) Transnationalization and binational agreements of cooperation

Literature on globalization affirms the global changes characterized by new information and communication technologies, the emergence of global markets and post national economies, and unprecedented levels of immigration and displacement (M. Suárez-Orozco & C. Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waters, 2001).

Acknowledging the tension of economic forces that push the world towards open markets, global theorists are concerned with challenging certain myths about globalization and development and redefining and reclaiming the role of states, through, for example, the role of international and the development of intra-national institutions that moderate the blunt impact of neo-liberal capitalist imperatives (T. L. Friedman, 2007). They address the changing circumstances as the world makes more visible the different governance layers, as well as the need for dialogue and the creation of partnerships with new institutions to forge a more sustainable future (Ayüz, 2003; Chang, 2003; T. Friedman, 2000; Stiglitz, 2003; Stromquist, 2005; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. M. Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Literature on transnational education from the European Community, for example, shows the need for dialogue and goodwill between organizations in different countries. Transnational education is complicated by the fact that it deals with diverse patterns of education provisions of different countries. Besides that, there is a rising interest in research focused on quality control of a booming industry of higher-education providers

that meet the demand that resource-strapped higher-education-systems cannot. Moreover, transnational education is not easily recognized by official authorities in the country where it is received. There are strong concerns on the quality of the programs and courses that struggle for official recognition in the host country. Consumer protection is an issue as well. Franchised education to be marketed in a different country implies an international partnership that abides by the international law, which complicates legal processes even more (Machado dos Santos, 2000; Santibanez et al., 2007).

Studies in equality and equity in education with a global perspective show the political influence of supranational organizations including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on developing countries' education systems in a global movement towards policies and practices that promote and evaluate in vertical rankings standardization of knowledge and competitiveness. The number of countries which participate in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), for example, has grown from 43 countries in 2000 to 63 countries in 2009 (http://www.oecd.org/). It should be noted that the same organization, which has produced and administered the test, has acknowledged that it is not bias-free. An OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development) informative presentation (Schleicher, 2003) acknowledges that students of better educated parents do better on the test than their classmates whose parents are less educated.

In her article "PISA: Is testing dangerous?," Laura Figazzolo (2009) discusses the influence of mass media on the perceptions of educators, parents and governments with respect to the impact of PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) on

questions of education policy. She mentions that the press makes a simple reference to link the PISA tests to a world measuring tool of the quality of education in the different countries. But, the end result is "the introduction of more measurements, of national testing systems based on the PISA model and methodology…and ultimately to linking teachers' performance and pay to students' tests scores." She rightly expresses her concern that this trend pushes teachers to teach to the test, which "fundamentally changes teaching and learning, and indeed, the overall meaning of education."

This trend is replicated and reinforced within countries that see the need of national measurements. The "No Child Left Behind Act" with its national standardized test in the United States, is a prime example. Current complaints and debates about 'teaching to the test' reflect the extent to which daily lessons are synchronized and standardized to this national measurement. The methodology and pedagogy of these tests and materials used to prepare students for them serve as stark examples, of what Valenzuela (1999) calls "subtractive schooling." That is, bias standardized testing and teaching practices minimize if not totally disregard the culture, funds of knowledge and language of minority students.

Critiques by local teachers and school administrators in developing Latin American countries with respect to standardized testing imposed by external international organizations and their own national leaders, who want to measure their countries' educational opportunities in comparison with others have turned into a difficult situation for governments. The teachers' strike in Oaxaca, Mexico in 2006 (Freidberg, 2005), which evolved into seven months of political unrest in the state, was initiated in part as a

protest against international pressures to change their educational policies in ways that dovetail with the demand tied to international money-lending institutions. Concerns arise in these countries in regards to the tendency to invest less in education and more in external debt, thus diminishing the potential of poor countries to achieve the global standards in education imposed by the aforementioned organization.

With the global orientation toward efficiency, equality, accountability, decentralization, user fees, privatization, and related forms of parental choice, the supranational organizations recommend that middle- and upper-class families pay/invest in their children's education. The efficiency orientation promotes private education as a way in which middle and upper-class families can use their status and wealth as a buffer against what they regard as problems particular to lower-class families like dropouts, low achievement, and student retention (Arriaga Lemus, 1999; Robertson et al., 2002; Santibanez et al., 2007; Stromquist, 2005).

Not all international migration has a transnational pattern. Studies in the transnationalization of international migration highlight the reciprocity in small groups, exchange in a circulating pattern and solidarity in communities that have essentially re-located. Scholars have compared, for example, the experiences of Mexican and Turkish immigrants who similarly endure harsh policies regarding their immigration status as well as subtractive education policies directed towards their native language. They are simultaneously exploited with ethno-market targeting. German Turks in Germany and

Hispanics in the U.S. get colonized within[3], thereby contributing to a redefinition of their culture and sense of social space across national boundaries (Eder, 2001; Lam, 2006).

The immigrant transnational experience of Mexicans is different from that of immigrants from other countries. Portes et al. (2007) and authors like González Gutiérrez (1999) and Goldring (2002) among others provide an excellent review of these distinctions highlighting several key aspects.

1. The Mexican immigrant population is larger than all other Latin American groups combined, and although there is an increase of urban and highly schooled Mexican immigration, it continues to be predominantly rural in origin.

2. Regarding immigrant associations in the U.S., Mexican immigrants commonly contribute regularly to their hometown civic associations (ex. Casa Guanajuato) as a continuation of their traditional duties. Civic associations are by far more numerous and durable than the ones created by other immigrant groups.

3. There is a strong and proactive presence of the federal state in the transnational field not seen with international activities of governments of other countries. For example, it is not unusual that Mexican state governors and legislators travel to build ties with immigrant federations in the U.S. and vice versa. The program *tres-por-uno* where the state contributes three dollars for every dollar Mexican immigrants send for civic contributions is well supported by most Mexican states. Gonzalez (1999) and Goldring (2002) studied the case of Zacatecas, a Mexican state that initiated working on transnational projects in conjunction with the Mexican government.
4. The programs and services of the *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores* (SRE - Ministry of Foreign Affairs) through their Institute of Mexican Abroad (IME is the acronym for the name in Spanish) does not compare to any other of its kind (Portes et al., 2007).

The Mexican government acknowledges the high emigration of Mexicans to the U.S. and the linked responsibility to create public policy that recognizes the existence of

[3] Blauner's (1964) concept of internal colonization refers to a pattern of domination of minority groups in a country. He observes four distinct characteristics in this type of colonization: forced integration of minorities into the dominant society on terms controlled by the dominant society; policies that constrain, transform, or destroy the culture of the minority groups; racism, which is a system of domination and justification; and management of society in terms of ethic status in accordance to the interests of the dominant group.

transnational communities, whose members live in both countries at the same time. In accordance with this, the Mexican government has created *plazas comunitarias* (community 'spaces') where adults receive library services as well as adult education to complete their elementary and secondary education as well as English and job skills training. Through Mexican consulates in the U.S. and Canada, Mexican immigrants receive legal and health services, binational trade guidance and support. The *Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior* (IME – Institute of Mexicans Abroad) created in 2003 coordinates these activities in the U.S. and Canada through the Mexican Consulates. The IME has a *Consejo Consultivo* (Board) with 105 members residing in Mexico, the U.S. and Canada. The objective of the *Consejo Consultivo* is to promote the wellbeing of Mexicans abroad and to develop strong ties among the three countries to enable cooperation in areas that include education, health, trade, culture and sports (Fox Quesada & Derbez Bautista, 2003).

Portes (2007) mentions that Mexican transnationalism shows signs of change from a grassroots phenomenon to one guided and supported by the international policies and programs of the home state. The state demonstrates its keen interest in supporting the Mexican expatriates. Former Mexican president Vicente Fox declared that he presided over *un gobierno para todos los mexicanos* (a government for all Mexicans) regardless of where they reside. The foreign policy motto of Mexico's current president, Felipe Calderón is, "*Más México en el mundo, más mundo en México*" (More Mexico in the world, more world in Mexico) ("Inaugura La Canciller Patricia Espinosa la XVII Reunión de Embajadores y Cónsules de México," 2007). This perspective explains the

active role of the *Instituto de Mexicanos en el Exterior* (IME) (Ayón, 2006; Cano & Délano, 2007) with Mexicans abroad.

Scholars point out that the history of Mexican transnationalism can be traced back to immigrants' contexts of labor flow and incorporation of mostly rural and frequently indigenous communities (Cano & Délano, 2007; Ruiz, 1998; Zamora, 1993; Zúñiga, 1998). This highly institutionalized form of migration has implications for the current concerns about immigrant loyalties, networking and culture (Faist, 2000; Foley, 1990; M. Suárez-Orozco, 1998).

Recent research studies on Mexican migration to new settlements demonstrate a distinct pattern of adaptation and Mexican transnationalism. Studies of transnational teachers in northern Mexico (Petrón, 2003) for example, show how teachers capitalize on their schooling experience and linguistic capital gained from both sides of the border and it to provide a truly bilingual and bicultural experience for their students. Edmund Hamann's (1999) dissertation documents the initial phase of a joint program between Dalton ISD in Georgia and the Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico as a response to the challenge presented to schools and the wider community created by an influx of thousands of Hispanic newcomers. In another study of the same community, Rubén Hernández and Víctor Zúñiga (2003) use social capital theory and funds of knowledge to show Mexican immigrant entrepreneurship activity. Additionally, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) state that the 'cost of belonging' and the **'**embeddedness of immigrants' in their communities have positive and negative effects. They explain that there is a form of social capital when individual members anticipate utilities if they

behave leading to "good standing" in a particular group. In this form of social capital, the predominant orientation is utilitarian. Individuals subordinate their current desires to collective expectations that can lead them, for example, to positive social recognition as well as to negative criminal activity.

c) Bilingual and immigrant education

The fact that Mexican immigrant high school students struggle to succeed in U.S. schools has been widely researched (Dotson-Blake, Foster, & Gressard, 2009; E. E. García, 2001; C. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1998; Valadez, 2008). Valenzuela (1999) argues that schools *subtract* resources from youth through assimilationist policies and practices. These practices minimize students' culture and language with the consequent loss of social capital needed to support them in their high school years. Furthermore, she argues that specifically in Texas, a culturally neutral perspective on teaching is untenable because the existing educational framework inscribed in state education policy is "culturally subtractive." She states that schools that teach in compliance with the state law subtract minority children from their culture, language, and identities linked to their communities, since they do not promote bilingualism and biculturalism in an additive fashion. Minority children who have not assimilated to the mainstream suffer segregation, and lack of motivation to graduate from high school (Valenzuela, 1999, 2002).

Ogbu's (1998) thesis of voluntary and involuntary minorities, which is used to explain minorities' school failure, places the category of Mexicans in the U.S., in general, as that of a caste-like involuntary minority. An involuntary minority is the one that has

internalized the dominant group's perception of their belonging to a status inferior to that of the mainstream through experiencing low payoff to their effort and adaptation to an inferior status. Obgu explains how involuntary minority students experience losses to their self-esteem with terrible academic consequences (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007; Ogbu, 1998). Mexican immigrant youth and their children who have been schooled in similar structures as U.S.-born youth face similar destinies. They adapt to their new environment with coping strategies that also frequently reproduce failure as well. Their ELL status places them as minorities with low expectations to achieve the same social and school standing as the mainstream students (Valenzuela, 2008). Regarding school structures and processes, Olsen (1997) describes how schools segregate students who cannot speak English and shuts them out of opportunities to learn and network with their schoolmates. School programs segregate students by skin color and class and prepare them for different futures, thus perpetuating an unequal society.

Zuñiga (2000) studies Mexican immigrant students' failure in U.S. schools and argues that there is enough evidence to support the argument that the reason for Mexican immigrant underachievement in U.S. high schools is not mainly the difficultly with the language (Gibson, 1997; Jasinski, 2000; Kao & Tienda, 1995) but the schooling practices. He observes that "*los rasgos singulares de la escuela pública estadounidense favorecen el fracaso de los niños y adolescentes mexicanos, no por intenciones preconcebidas de los actores escolares, sino por los mandatos curriculares y los rasgos históricos de la institución escolar*" (Zuñiga, 2000, p. 312). (Specific characteristics of public schools in the United States create an environment conducive to the failure of Mexican students of

all ages, not due to preconceived intentions of schools themselves, but because of curricular mandates and the historical features of the educational system.)

In the arena of bilingual education in the U.S., scholars have produced research that supports bilingual education programs (Cummins, 2000, 2001; Cummins, Chow, & Schecter, 2006), which include dual language programs (Haver, 2003; Porter, 1996) and English immersion programs. In Mexico, research and practice show that bilingual education in the public school system is provided by dual language programs in elementary schools of indigenous villages. This situation is complicated by the lack of bilingual educators that speak both Spanish and their own indigenous language. In public schools, bilingual programs function through the politics of accommodation[4] of over 60 different Amerindian cultures where ethnic tongues are favored (Hidalgo, 1994). Regarding Spanish-English bilingual education in Mexican schools, private schools teach English for the most part in bilingual education programs, which are similar to the U.S. dual language programs (Petrón, 2003). The Mexican public school system does not have English-Spanish bilingual programs, but introduces English as a foreign language in *secundaria* (7^{th} – 9^{th} grade) (2007b).

Scholarly work has clearly shown that immigrant students draw upon cultural resources and ethnic identities not available to minority students born in the U.S. and that those resources help immunize them from the debilitating effects of racism and discrimination (Gibson, 1997; Ogbu, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Stanton-Salazar (1997) points out that there is not yet available research to support that

[4] Lijphard (1996) refers to politics of accommodation when there are several dissimilar power blocks or ethnic divisions within a country, and state unity and functional democracy is achieved through a results oriented political system, where disparate ideological commitments are tolerated and consensus made.

immigrant youth "make it" without significant institutional support. He mentions that "the development and maintenance of heightened levels of motivation, when not rooted in systematic and consistent access to institutional support, represents a form of heroism sustainable only by a most unrelenting misperception of structural reality" (p. 29).

Reports constantly inform of the high dropout rate of Hispanics in the U.S. and that the situation is getting worse (Barton, 2005; Fry, 2003). Fry mentions that high school dropout rates are a key performance measure for the American education system. Figures that count only Latinos who dropped out after entering the American education system yield a rate of about 15 percent among 16- to 19-year-olds**,** twice as high as the dropout rate for comparable non-Hispanic whites. Fry reports that because of immigration and high birth rates, the number of Hispanic 16- to 19-year-old dropouts grew dramatically. Nationally, thirty-five percent of Latino youth are immigrants, compared to less than five percent of non-Latino youth. Barton argues that this challenging social reality must be matched by greater efforts and success in getting students through to graduation, thereby opening doors for more educational opportunities and decent paying jobs. Furthermore, when students do drop out, there needs to be a larger system of second chance opportunities for them to drop back into school.

Binational cooperation projects on education at the school level show that U.S. teachers with teaching development workshops and teaching experiences in Mexico change their cultural perception of immigrant students in the U.S. evidenced by a positive change in their teaching practice. Calderon (1995) reports on binational cooperation efforts to improve the teaching of Latino children in '*la frontera*' (the border). Her study

focuses on the program of Leadership Enhancement Academy for Bilingual Education (LEA) in El Paso. Hamman and Zúñiga and Hernández (1999; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005) report on the Dalton teachers' summer program in Monterrey that expose Anglo teachers to the culture of their Latino students back home. It was found that the Georgia Project benefitted the community through positive intervention of Mexican scholars and teachers in seven school districts in Dalton, Georgia that led to institutional legitimacy for controversial positions and debates in bilingual education, increase of "cultural knowledge" to respond to immigration, presence of intermediaries for dialogue and mediation between immigrants and local actors, the creation of a Latino immigrant organization, and gaining of prestige to an otherwise often invisible and looked down immigrant community.

d) Meeting the educational needs of immigrant youth and the dropout crisis

The impact of millions of immigrants in the U.S. has been felt by all institutions. Schools struggle to meet the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy-based standards, a task complicated by the constant arrival of newcomers, most of whom do not speak English. Because of the "language barrier" that is created and perpetuated by inadequately-equipped schools, poor leadership and policies that are ill-suited to these youth, new immigrant students are frequently held behind and thus lose their opportunity to graduate from high school. Despite the large percentages of students dropping out and literally disappearing from school, from one year to the next, statistics fail to report the impact of this event for which school districts should be held accountable (Valenzuela, Fuller, & Vasquez-Heilig, 2006).

The Hispanic dropout rate in North America is the highest among all ethnic groups; and in a related comparison, represents the group with the lowest rate of high school completion. Exacerbated by the limited English proficiency of immigrant students, the system of high-stakes standardized testing leaves these students behind (Valenzuela, 2004). The focus on standards, assessment, and accountability ostensibly designed to raise teaching quality (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2006) and the subsequent teaching-to-the-test mentality frequently results in a marginalization of children, curricula, or both (Carnoy, Loeb, & Smith, 2001; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997). According to McNeil and Valenzuela (2000), these standardized tests damage the educational quality and opportunities for minority, economically disadvantaged youth, a situation exacerbated by poor schools serving students in poverty. The importance placed in these tests encourage administrators and teachers to use scarce resources on test preparation materials leaving students without time to learn skills and knowledge that can help them get out of poverty. This is a practice that tracks students to low social stratification once they are out of school (Foley, 1990; Portes & Rumbaut, 1997; Tienda & Mitchell, 2006).

Raising standardized test scores on high-stakes tests has had little impact on educational outcomes that count (Carnoy et al., 2001) such as high school completion and the likelihood of students attending college (McNeil, 2005). This is particularly troublesome because high school graduation rates are alarmingly low in Texas. Even when statistics show that only 1.6% of students in Texas drop out of school each year (percentage of an event dropout rate explained below,) the fact is that there were 274,208

8th graders in Texas in 1993 and only 197,186 graduates in 1998 while the population increased by 5.9% (Greene, 2002). Vasquez and Hammond (2008) also found that statistics and ways of counting students are manipulated to obscure the real dropout crises.

Before addressing dropout statistics among immigrant, first-generation youth and their later-generation counterparts, a distinction must be drawn between status and event dropout rates. Greene (2002) clarifies the difference: "A status dropout rate is the percentage of young people (usually 16 through 24 years old) who are not currently enrolled in school and who have not received a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) credential." (Refer to Figure 1, page 6) On the other hand, an event dropout refers to the percentage of students who drop out of school in a given year. Status dropout rates are generally higher than event dropout rates since the former may cover a five or six year span while the later rate captures only one year. The status dropout rate reflects more closely what people think when they hear 'dropout rate'; although, statistics of dropouts per year refer to 'dropout events' unless 'status' is specified. Orfield et al. (2004) explains that both rates explained above are frequently under-estimations. In Texas, for example, students are not considered dropouts when they take the GED Certificate (General Educational Development) option to graduate from high school. He also explains that Texas accountability rates using the individualized tracking system (PEIMS) includes many ways to exclude students from the enrollment system that calculates data.

According to Laird, DeBell, and Chapman (2006), Hispanics were the most likely to drop out in 2004 (8.9%), compared to African Americans (5.7%) and White students

(3.7%). Students in high school who are past the typical high school age are at higher risk of becoming dropouts. “Specifically, 4.0 percent of 15- to 16-year-olds and 3.1 percent of 17-year-olds dropped out in the one-year reference period, compared with 7.6 percent of 19-year-olds and 28.2 percent of 20- through 24-year-olds” (p. 4). Laird et al (2006) report that the West (6.1%) and the Southern regions of the U.S. (5.4%) register higher event dropout rate than the Northeast (3.8%) and the Midwest (3.1%) but mention that school system performance cannot be evaluated exclusively with these rates because they do not have control over migration and immigration that affect those regions.

These numbers duly recorded and cited are indications of the ease with which many researchers pass on obviously inaccurate information. Who needs solutions for a problem that does not exist? It is part of the purpose of this dissertation to bring the reality of the Hispanic dropout rate into the conversation.

The National Center for Education and Statistics (NCES) reports that since 1972 the status dropout rate for Whites, African-American, and Hispanics ages 16-24 have declined, but rates for Hispanics have remained higher than those for other racial/ethnic groups. The report shows that in 2004, 38.4 % of Hispanic 16- through 24-year-olds who were born outside of the U.S. were high school status dropouts that is, they were former students that left the educational system. Furthermore, first-generation U.S.-born Hispanics had a 14.7 % dropout rate, slightly higher than second-generation Hispanics (13.7%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Hispanic students’ higher high school dropout rates relative to White and African American students are partly attributable to the markedly high dropout rates among

Hispanic immigrants. It is important to note that more than one-half of Hispanic immigrants never enrolled in a U.S. school, but are included as high school dropouts if they did not complete high school in their country of origin (Kaufman & Alt, 2004; Llagas, 2003), highlighting the binational nature of the dropout problem.

Indeed, the 2000 status dropout rate for Hispanics born outside the United States (44 percent) is higher than the rate for first-generation immigrant Hispanic youth (15 percent) (Llagas, 2003). This is alarming when we consider that among youth born in the United States, both first- and second- generation Hispanics are still more likely to drop out than their counterparts of other races/ethnicities (Valenzuela, 1999, 2005). "Two years ago, more than eight out of ten seventh and eighth-graders with limited English skills failed the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. Ninth- and tenth-graders did worse" (Hart, 2006). These low levels of academic achievement diminish the incentive for students to continue in school (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999).

As evidence of the burgeoning crisis, a recent analysis of 2004-05 statewide Texas data that followed ninth grade students to the tenth grade, Valenzuela, Vasquez-Heilig & Fuller (2006) show that 25 percent of all English language learners—the majority of whom are likely to be immigrants— drop out during this one critical transition. They further cite evidence which shows that by the end of twelfth grade, Texas only graduates 20 percent of this population.

Orfield et al (2004) report that most states have no meaningful graduation rate accountability in place. They mention that Texas represents one of the 39 states with

"soft" AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) goals for graduation rates. By "soft" the authors mean that schools and districts that fall below the graduation rate goal established by the state can still "make AYP." In fact, the Texas "federally approved" state plan requires schools to either meet the "70% benchmark" or "*show improvement*" (emphasis in the reference). "The required 'improvement' in Texas is tiny, just $1/10^{th}$ of 1 percent for any school or district that falls below the 70% goal" (2004, p. 16).

Research has been conducted to identify the causes of low Hispanic achievement. Some authors focus on studying students who do not have English language academic proficiency and are not taught in their native language (Gonzalez, Huerta-Macías, & Tinajero, 1998; Noguera, 2005; Suarez-Orozco, 1987). Other authors focus on influences that affect the teaching and learning process including parent involvement, cultural capital, funds of knowledge, racial discrimination, under funded-schools, teacher attrition, and disenfranchising attitudes toward school among others (Fuller, 2002; Gándara & Moreno, 2002; González et al., 1995; Rauh, Parker, Garfinkel, Perry, & Andrews, 2003; Sykes, 2003). Efforts have been made to improve immigrant and minority academic achievement. Bilingual programs in schools are evidence of such efforts (Gonzalez et al., 1998; González & Moll, 2002; Hamman, 1999).

Chapter 3*: Theoretical Framework and Methodology'*

In this chapter, I state the theoretical framework and the methodology used for this case study of LUCHA, a binational partnership in education that serves Hispanic immigrant students in U.S. high schools. To this end, it is important to situate the researcher's theoretical perspective as an instrument of inquiry, since in this dissertation, it is my philosophical grounding that determines what kinds of knowledge are possible and how I ensure that my findings are adequate and legitimate. I ground my philosophical stance on constructionism, since for me meaning is not discovered, but constructed through social interaction (Crotty, 1998). In this dissertation, I employ qualitative research to inquire about the LUCHA program. As a researcher, I had to choose a study design that could provide information related to the inquiry.

I also present the theoretical framework I used to explore the complex phenomena that come into play in a case of binational cooperation in education to create and support this program; I restate the research questions that drive this dissertation's single case study, and present the methodology, research design and methods used to collect and analyze data for this investigation.

Theoretical Framework

In recent times immigration and education have become the foci of research that relates to the interdependence of Mexico and the U.S. However, after an extensive search, it appears that no research to date exists that constructs the dropout problem in binational

terms—that is, as a binational problem involving transnational youth that begs for a joint solution. The complexity of the phenomena observed and the lack of a single theory to explain it make me take an open stance on my theoretical framework. There are three major theories that contribute to my understanding of how to gather and analyze the data that relates to the development, and the dynamics of the LUCHA program, a high school dropout prevention program, which is the focus of this case study. They are social capital, cultural capital and the culture of caring.

Social and Cultural Capital

A discussion and application of several theoretical forms of capital are especially appropriate in the examination of the start of a binational education program and its implementation and refinement in four South Texas school districts. Social capital is particularly relevant to address the structure of relationships among individuals who were the driving forces of binational cooperation agreements in education and the network relationships that started the partnerships with independent school districts. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119). In other words, Bourdieu refers to the network relations within a group that have a potential to be useful and concrete resources from which the individual or group can profit socially and/or economically (Svendsen & Svendsen, 2004). It is also a useful way to shed light on the way breakdowns or successes in these partnerships affect the flow of school-related information and support. This study uses the concept of social capital to explain

the role of key players in the creation of LUCHA as well as the successes that took place in some schools as a result of dynamic and committed individuals.

Cultural capital, on the other hand, is an appropriate theory to explain the similar cultural factors present in binational institutionalized relationships among participants from both countries, as well as immigrant student education success in the LUCHA program. Bourdieu explains that capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, experience, qualifications, and permanent dispositions a person has through the course of his/her life. Cultural capital is a symbolic capital that includes the cultural knowledge one possesses, which in turn confers power and status. This form of capital includes the products created by the individual, since his permanent dispositions come into play in the creation of these products.

Coleman (1988) argues for a theoretical orientation to "account not only for the actions of individuals in particular contexts but also for the development of social organization." With his theory of social capital, Coleman links two different views to describe and explain social action: the sociologists that "see the actor as socialized and action as governed by social norms, rules, and obligations" and the economists' view that "sees the actor as having goals independently arrived at, as acting independently, and as wholly self-interest" (p. S95). The fact that LUCHA has obviously humanitarian and 'better self' goals and that, as a part of the K-16 Education Center at UT is expected to be an economically self-sustaining entity, makes Coleman's theory a useful one.

Another form of social capital Coleman examines is that of information channels, since it is a way to acquire social capital. It is through the use of social relations maintained for other purposes that we obtain information. In his analysis of the effect of social capital available to high school students dropping out, for example, Coleman found that students appear especially responsive to the supply of social capital, both inside and outside of the family, to decide to remain in high school until graduation versus dropping out. Thus the tie between the application of social capital to educational endeavors and consequences has been established. The examination of LUCHA through the lens of the theory of social capital provides insights and connections not otherwise available. It also contributes to an understanding of what immigrant students need to feel in order to be firmly rooted in the United States educational system. It could be argued that the service of transcript analysis which allows students credit for work completed in Mexico that aligns with United States courses, (see chapter 4) increases the social capital of the students which gives them more hope and determination to see this difficult educational journey through to a successful completion.

The theory of social capital has been applied in a range of fields, from sociology and anthropology to administration, and finance (Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004). Regarding studies on Mexican origin populations, this theory has been used, among others, in relation to the study of social inequalities (Ream, 2005; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995), differences in academic achievement of minorities (Valenzuela, 1999; Valenzuela & Dornsbuch, 1994), and academic upward mobility resources (Frank et al., 2004; Torres-Guzmán, Kleyn, Morales-Rodríguez, & Han, 2005).

Both Bourdieu (1977) and Coleman (1988) apply their theory to the field of educational research. Taking from classical theories of economic capital –Marx, Durkheim, Weber– and theories of reciprocity –Mauss, Simmel–, Bourdieu theorized on the different forms of capital, some of which are tangible like economic capital, and others which are less tangible including social, cultural (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and symbolic (Svendsen & Svendsen, 2004). Bourdieu posits that the only way to explain the structure and dynamics of differentiated societies is to acknowledge and understand that capital can take a variety of forms.

Bourdieu argues that informational/cultural capital exists in three forms: its objectified state exemplified by humanly created products such as books, its institutionalized state, which includes cultural qualifications such as academic progress, and its embodied state, which refers to the permanent disposition of the individual such as habitus. Symbolic capital is a more hidden or camouflaged kind of capital masked by moral ties, charisma or meritocratic symbolism. Throughout the study, we observe the three different forms of cultural capital at play in the context of a binational program. For example, we can identify the objectified state of cultural capital in the Mexican courses, the institutionalized state in students' academic qualification and prior studies before coming to the U.S., and the embodied state in the permanent disposition of Spanish speaking individuals to communicate at ease in both countries.

Bourdieu observes two attributes present in social capital. The first consists of the social structure that facilitates certain actions of actors, whether they are persons or corporations; and the second one is that social capital is productive in the sense that in its

absence certain ends cannot be achieved. Coleman explains "Social relations and social structures facilitate some forms of social capital; actors establish relations purposefully and continue them when they continue to provide benefits" (p. S105). He further explains that trustworthiness of social structures allow the proliferation of obligations and expectations. This concept applies to individuals, groups and even countries as it is the case of the Mexican government that recognizes its obligation to serve Mexicans abroad, and Mexicans abroad who expect the Mexican government to do something for them even though they are not in Mexican territory.

Coleman's form of social capital 'information channels' may be expanded with Granovetter's (1973) network theory of the strength of weak ties. In his study on the type of ties that help people achieve upward mobility by finding better jobs, he shows that usually weak ties that are not built in close social circles are the ones that people generally use to find jobs. His structural argument is that "those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive" (p. 1371). Through his study we see that "weak ties, often denounced as generative of alienation (Wirth, 1938) are seen as indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities; strong ties, breeding local cohesion, lead to overall fragmentation" (p. 1378).

Nan Lin et al (1981) confirm Granovetter's theory on the strength of ties in a study on structural factors in occupational status attainment. Their study analysis shows that a person relies more on constructed rather than ascribed relations (such as family relations) and that, for example, the strong tie between his contact and the hiring firm

becomes increasingly important. They conclude that "in time, the individual's accumulated social resources become the personal (and prescribed) resources for the next generation" (p. 405). The constructed social capital of the LUCHA program's founder, Dr. Alanis, throughout his life and professional career was the foundation to build a strong network in Mexico and in the south Texas school districts studied in this dissertation. Because he was well known in school districts, beyond the circle of people he knew personally, the reputation he built through 'weak ties' also served the progress of LUCHA because it was attached to his name and well-known and admired reputation.

Putnam (2000) takes the concept of social capital to a macro level, that of society engagement. His "core idea of social capital is that social networks have value" (p. 18), along with the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that relate to them, characteristics of what is called "civic virtue." He distinguishes social capital from other forms of capital such as physical and human by "the fact that civic virtue is more powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations" (p. 19). Putnam relates civil engagement with social capital as being positively related, observing that a decline in civil engagement indicates a decline in the social capital of the people. This can be particularly relevant to the population that LUCHA serves, immigrant students, whose families, for a variety of reasons, may not be as civically engaged as the families of other students and are at a disadvantage due to their lack of social capital.

I also marshal the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2001) in order to at least in part, account for the emergence of the binational endeavor embodied in LUCHA. This application of the theory departs from most prior conceptualizations that focus primarily

on singular, rather than binational contexts. My study applies cultural capital to a binational, institutional cooperation building context where certain predispositions, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and overlapping, if not shared, frames of reference operate –and in the best of situations– in an enabling manner. It is also used to characterize the expectations of schools that are hidden from view for lower-class children and their families (Bourdieu & Jean-Claude, 1977; DiMaggio, 1982; Gibson Consulting Group, 2004).

Bourdieu explains that capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, experience, qualifications, and permanent dispositions a person has through the course of his/her life. Cultural capital is a symbolic capital that includes the cultural knowledge one possesses, which in turn confers power and status. This form of capital includes the products created by the individual, since his permanent dispositions come into play in the creation of these products. Bourdieu and Passeron first used the term **"**cultural capital**"** to explain differences in the educational outcome in France in their book *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Jean-Claude, 1977), where they point out that children obtain cultural capital from their parents, who transmit the attitudes and knowledge the children need to succeed in the current educational system. This is a theory that has been extensively used in academic research such as this dissertation. I join the large community of scholars who acknowledge this theory as significant and useful in understanding their research data.

As mentioned before, the three forms of cultural capital –embodied, objectified and institutionalized– help explain the cultural aspects present in the creation and development of the LUCHA program. The embodied cultural capital form, which refers to the inherited and acquired cultural capital a person acquires through socialization with the family and the different social structures including class, family, and education explains in part the binational negotiations that take place in both languages, Spanish and English, in both locations, Mexico and the U.S. This form of capital is the result of internalization of culture, which is not totally voluntary or involuntary, and refers to a set of acquired patterns of thought, behavior, and taste.

Theory of Caring / Ethics of Care

The complexity of the binational LUCHA program cannot be fully explained with the above mentioned theories. Besides the social and cultural capital theories, there is a need to explain the successes and disappointments, as well as the divergent perceptions, of the LUCHA program in the schools where it is offered, and the program's role in sustaining a caring relationship of institutions across borders. The theory of caring proves particularly useful to examine the relationships among the program participants at all levels – teachers and students, school administrators and teachers, LUCHA program and participants in schools, and LUCHA program and participants in Mexican official agencies, and the impact that these relationships have to the benefit or the detriment of the program.

A normative ethical theory, the Theory of Caring was developed in the second half of the twentieth century as part of the feminist movement (Amorós, 1985; Cortina,

1990; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). This theory deals with morality and what is considered to be right or wrong, and it answers the question "how ought one act, morally speaking?" Ethics of care emphasize the importance of relationships (rather than separation, detachment, and individuality) in contrast to ethical theories that emphasize universal standards, rationality, and impartiality (rather than an ethic of justice) exemplified in strict rules and laws (Kant, 1998).

The Theory of Caring was first developed by Gilligan (1982) as a critical response to Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral development. To understand moral reasoning, Kohlberg based his theory on the Piagetian stages of cognition concluding that women had less moral development than men of the same age. Gilligan's response was to assert that women were not inferior in their personal moral development, but rather that they were different. In Gilligan's model of stages of the ethics of care, she combined Freudian psychology on ego development (Fine, 1973) with Kohlberg and Piaget (1971) to explain that the transitions between the stages of moral development in women are fueled by changes in the sense of self rather than in changes in cognitive capability.

Noddings applies the Theory of Caring to education and explains that the theory is feminine in the deep classical sense, since it is rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness. The carer or care taker is open to what the cared-for is saying and might be experiencing and is able to reflect upon it through attitude or action (Noddings, 1984). 'Caring' is then recognized by the cared-for, creating a connection between the carer and the cared-for and a degree of reciprocity.

When teachers and staff tell ELL students that they are cared for, but students do not experience and feel that caring, the connection and reciprocity that students need to feel with the teachers and the school is not present. A school district may go through the motions to give the superficial impression that it cares for their ELL students' success. These students then hear that the school cares for them, but they often feel frustrated when they see their intellect is not challenged with advanced courses and their schedule is filled with 'time-wasting electives' while they learn English. Frustration can be felt even when the institution has programs that are intended to provide educational support to ELLs when the programs do not offer the necessary assistance. School districts may obtain funding for the LUCHA program and have their students take online core courses from Mexico in Spanish but still fail to put in place the true caring component that establishes a connection between the carer and the cared-for. When LUCHA students are left without a tutor or a teacher to help them with difficult course content, they may drop or fail the class. If we add that these same students do not feel that anyone in school cares about their learning, no program may help, and the probability that they will drop out of school increases.

According to Noddings (1984) an essential part of caring from the view of the one caring is apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as closely as possible, and acting accordingly. Unfortunately, as will be illustrated in Chapter 5 in this dissertation, this is not always the case with LUCHA teachers and others who provide LUCHA services. Students in the LUCHA program are assigned to tutors and teachers in the ESL program, a program with the highest instructor turn- over in public schools (Fuller, 2002).

This situation hinders the caring and reciprocal relationship that students and teachers build over time. Valenzuela (1999) notes how "when teachers deny their students the opportunity to engage in reciprocal relationships, they simultaneously invalidate the definition of education that most of these young people embrace"(p. 23). She further explains that Mexican students in particular feel a rejection of their culture as well when they perceive that teachers have low expectations of them, a sure sign of academic disrespect. This situation worsens when teachers do not relate to the specific Mexican immigrant student population in the LUCHA program either because their life experiences are completely detached from the immigration experience, they perceive native Mexicans as inferior, or perceive immigrants in general as a threat.

Regarding the Theory of Care or ethics of care from a global perspective, Held (2006) states that ethics of care show promise for dealing with global problems and with efforts to foster international civility. Rethinking international politics, Robinson (1999) explains how ethics and international relations cannot be regarded as the opposition of 'ought' and 'is', since "the way that we live and organize ourselves can be understood only through reference to the historically developed and evolving ideas and beliefs that we hold—ideas and beliefs which have value and thus reflect our ideas about morality" (p. 1).

Methodology

The study of the LUCHA program requires dealing with the breath and scope of two countries; a qualitative case study research approach provided the necessary research tools. Qualitative research implies "a situated activity that locates the observer in the

world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006, p. 3) , which consists of "a series of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 3). While being interpretative and holistic, a phenomenological approach is used. That is, the attitude towards culture will be cautious. "While it offers us entrée to a comprehensive set of meanings, it shuts us off from an abundant form of untapped significance" (Crotty, 2003). Phenomenology focuses on "the things themselves" as objects of experience before we start thinking about them, interpreting them or attributing any meaning to them" (p. 79). "Phenomenology asks us not to take our received notions for granted but… to call into question our whole culture, our manner of seeing the world, and being in the world in the way we have learned it" (Wolff, 1984, p.192 in Crotty, 2003, p. 80). The phenomenological approach will provide a just view of the two cultures involved in the process.

In this research, I looked for perspectives that are left out, and assumptions that need to be challenged (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). For example, I challenge the assumption that any teacher from Mexico in the U.S. or any ESL teacher will have success with immigrant Mexican students. This question is pursued in Chapter 5, particularly in the comparison of two LUCHA leaders in the same district but different schools.

Research Questions

The research questions for this dissertation focus on high-school intervention programs for English language learners (in this case immigrant students also) that are designed to operate through collaboration with the students' home country. Specifically, the research questions for this study are:

1. What challenges had to be met in order to initiate and develop the LUCHA program, a binational education program to combat the high dropout rate among Latino immigrants?

2. What can be learned from the implementation and practice of the LUCHA program in school districts with almost identical, homogeneous populations, and different levels of success with the program?

Methods

This research is an historical interpretative case study based on historical and ethnographic methods. Because history overlaps with contemporary events, this case study relies on many of the same techniques as historical research (Beverley, 2005; Stake, 2005), but it additionally consists of direct and participant observation, face-to-face interviews, and recorded telephone interviews (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Direct and participant observations took place in both countries as did the research interviews.

Fortuitously, I was a part-time employee at the LUCHA program which afforded me daily access to the director and the ten other assistants who worked there at the time of the study. Furthermore, as a LUCHA coordinator assistant, I also developed intimate knowledge of the internal workings of the Center as well as of the key players on both sides of the border. I generated copious ethnographic notes and collected documentary forms of data that include pamphlets, internet-based documents, and memoranda that inform my analysis. While the bulk of my data comes from primary sources, I also relied on a variety of secondary sources in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the historical and contemporary antecedents that helped give rise to this path breaking inter-institutional and intergovernmental arrangement that promises in a novel way to help

boost the graduation rate for Latinos, a fast-growing segment of our student population in Texas.

Setting

The LUCHA program, focus of this study, is one of three programs offered by the K-16 Education Center, Division of Continuing Education at The University of Texas at Austin. The center is housed in a four-story building along with offices from other centers. A number of people work in all areas of the center. At the time this dissertation the center employs 30 full time employees, 6 part-time employees, 10 contractors. Activities and programs within the Center include scoring standardized testing, working on curriculum alignment, and three programs with online courses that serve different student populations. The LUCHA program student population is the Latino immigrant high school student, in general, and the Mexican immigrant high school student in particular.

The story told by this dissertation takes place in four public school districts in South Texas which are described in detail in Chapter 5. Each of these districts had chosen to participate in the LUCHA program, although as the data will indicate, three districts began with LUCHA at the same time, with the fourth district beginning its association at a later date. A number of high schools within the districts were selected for study. The data also shows the high Latino population density in these districts as well as a number of other homogenous qualities which make them attractive for comparison.

Various sites and institutions in Mexico were obviously of primary importance in this study of binational cooperation. Mexico City, for example, is where the educational

bureaucracy and engine of Mexican public education is located. The importance of the schools in Mexico which cooperate with UT in the exchange of transcripts and other information cannot be underestimated.

The program, in its pilot stages, started operations on September, 2006. Although designed to have statewide scope, during its first year in operations it only provided services to three school districts in Hidalgo County, which is located in the south east border of the state. Two of the six bilingual staff members of the LUCHA program were working on location during the data collection period. They promote and provide support to school districts with the LUCHA program.

Considering the case study as a bounded unit of study (Stake, 2005) with – 'permeable borders' (Foley, 2007), it became obvious to the researcher that the U.S. and the Mexican current and historical contexts influence the happenings of the LUCHA program. To correctly situate this case study, the historical contexts of both countries were studied and are presented in the literature review section of this dissertation. The diagram below taken from Stake (2005) served well to plan the research design.

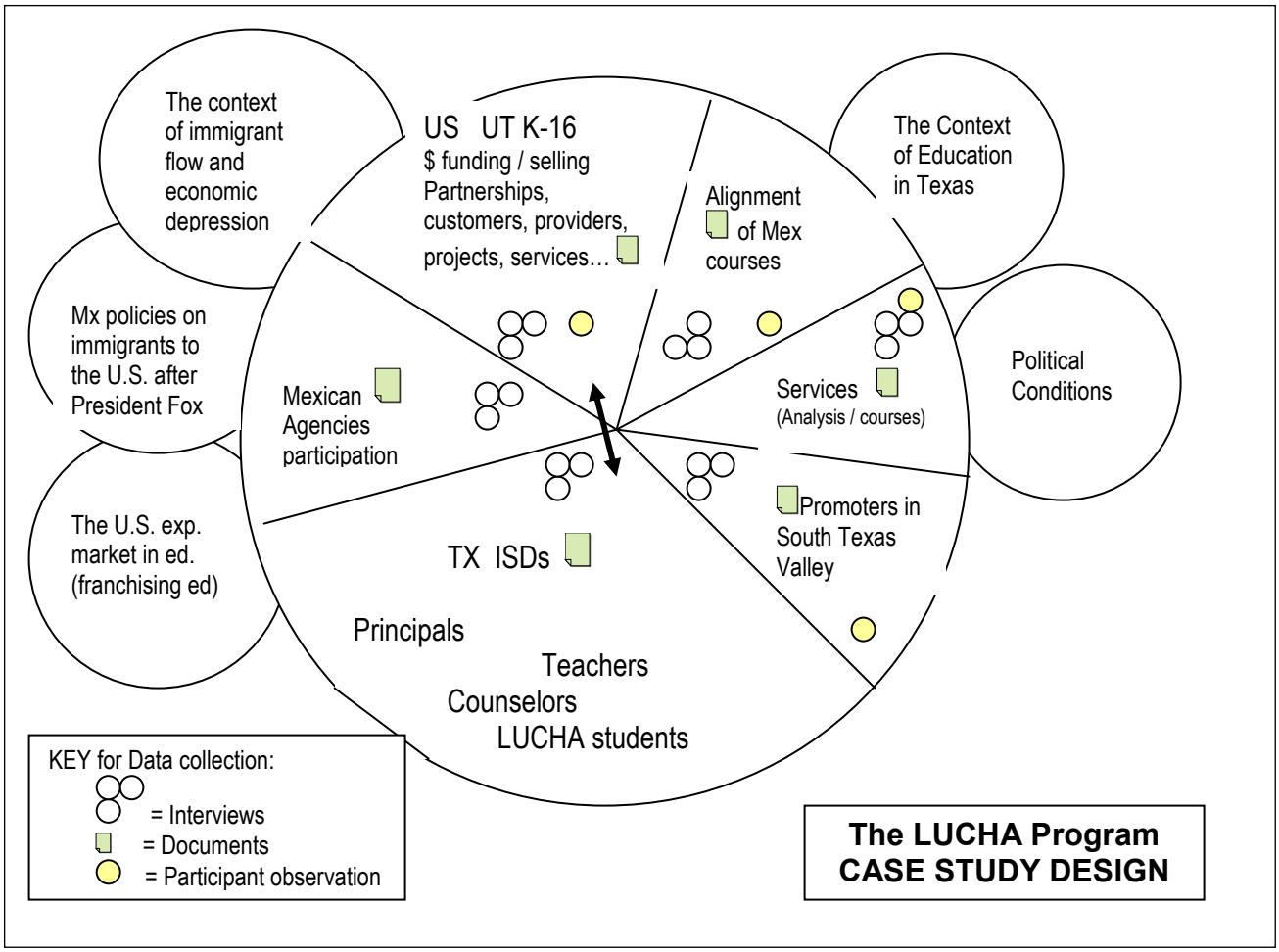


Figure 2. The case study design

In the research design, the LUCHA program and its different aspects are represented with the pie diagram. The UT K-16 Education Center houses the LUCHA program; it is represented by the top slice of the pie diagram. To the right of the UT K-16, important elements of the program follow –Alignment of Mexican courses to the Texas academic standards (TEKS), Services –transcript request from Mexico, Transcript Analysis, diagnostic placement tests, and LUCHA courses–, and UT Promoters of the LUCHA program in the South Texas Valley. To the left of the UT K-16 in the diagram, the Mexican official agencies participation, and in the bigger 'slice of the pie' the Texas

independent school districts (ISDs) that partnered with the K-16 Education Center to have the LUCHA program in their districts. Inside of every piece of the pie, three different symbols represent the kind of data collection used in each site. Three circles together represent interview methods; an icon with a document represents documents collected and analyzed, and a small isolated circle represents participant observation in the different sites. The double sided arrow in the middle of the pie links the UT K-16 and the school district partnerships, relationships that set the foundation for the LUCHA program existence.

Gaining Access

The sometimes delicate process of gaining access to people and locations for data gathering for this dissertation was ongoing as one opportunity and level of access led to another. I gained access to my employment as a graduate research assistant in the LUCHA program through one of my professors. My overlapping interests in the program include that it consists of Mexican and U.S. partnerships, it involves both countries' educational systems, and the students served are Mexican immigrants in U.S. schools. I gained access to school districts and the schools within them through networking and by meticulously following the required legal protocols. I followed the researcher's IRB protocol to gather data on site in school districts in order to be able to record any needed information.

My experience as a researcher was that my shifting positionality as an insider/ outsider researcher changed as different situations occurred and as I collected my research data in different spaces. This shift affected the kind of data I was able to collect

and consequently affected the way I would interpret it. Gaining access to people and locations is only one of many factors that determine the kind of data a researcher collects. For example, data suggests that when my position as an outsider was revealed, LUCHA staff became distrustful, particularly when I started taking copious notes during meetings. I experienced how my positionality as an insider and an outsider would shift depending on how my interlocutors would perceive me throughout my three year study. While I was perceived as an insider, flow of information would be continuous. However, when I was positioned as an outsider, access to information would not be smooth.

Access to information is also enhanced by the level of rapport the researcher establishes with research participants. My Mexican education, U.S. graduate studies, work as an educator and experiences as a mother, all helped me establish rapport with a variety of subjects in this study. Without rapport, I would not have gained access to valuable information (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2006).

This connection is recognized by Seidman (1991). "In qualitative research, rapport is a distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism that primarily serves the interest of the researcher." Furthermore, "it is something that is continually being negotiated between the researcher and researched and can at any time be rejected by research participants" (p. 96). It can be impacted by such factors as race, gender, class, hierarchy, or status (Seidman, 1991).

Sampling

Research participants play a key and unique role in the history, creation, development, and maintenance of the LUCHA program. It is for this reason that they

were interviewed with a tailored interview protocol that fit their own position. (See Appendix A) A purposeful sampling technique, criterion-based selection, was used to select the key participants in the development of the program (Merriam, 1998).

All participants informed this research. With such a wealth of data collected through my interviews, I was only able to include the words of a limited number of participants in the study in order to answer both of my research questions. I am confident that the rest of the data will be the foundation of other research and publications in the future.

Participants

Participants in this study were situated in three main locations: The LUCHA program headquarters in Austin, Texas, the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas, as well as three sites in Mexico –Mexico City, Monterrey, in the state of Nuevo León, and Veracruz, in the state of Veracruz. There was an exciting range of participants, which included high officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico, an associate dean of continuing education at the University of Texas, the superintendent of a school district in the Rio Grande Valley, bilingual coordinators, teachers, tutors, and students from various districts in South Texas. Furthermore, LUCHA personnel and other employees of the Continuing Education Department at UT who have lent support and expertise to the program administrators were interviewed. All participants were interviewed during the data collection period from 2007 to 2009.

Data Collection

Mertens (1998) defines data collection as "the vehicle through which researchers collect information to answer their research questions and defend their conclusions and recommendations based on the findings from the research" (p. 285). In this study, data collection began during the summer 2007 and finished in May 2009. It was gathered through the following qualitative research methods: participatory observation, interviews, field notes and researcher's log, and documents.

Participatory observation

According to Trochim (2001), "participatory observation requires that the researcher become a participant in the culture or context being observed… The researcher needs to become accepted as natural part of the culture to ensure that the observations are of the natural phenomenon" (p. 161). For Yin (2003) participatory observation has as strengths that the data collection is done of real events and in context, and additionally the researcher gets insights into interpersonal behavior and the motives behind it. The weaknesses observed are that it is time consuming, it is selective, participants might proceed differently because they are being observed; it is costly; and there may be bias due to investigator's manipulation of information. Mertens (1998) recognizes the difficult researcher's task of "trying to collect data and maintain a questioning and reflective stance" (p. 318) while the researcher becomes a natural participant.

As a participatory observer in this study, I was aware of my complicated role; I was a LUCHA staff member who at the same time had to distance herself from the program in order to be as objective as possible. Several aspects and challenges of the role of participatory observer are described here. Gaining trust took time. At first, people

would be very conscious of my presence. Everybody in the office knew that I was there to help and also to conduct research on the program. I stayed in the program for over three years which eased communication and I became a 'natural' in the office environment. Nevertheless, I could not detach myself from my research role of participant observer. This stance made me become critical of the decisions made during my participation with the program, while at the same time I was concentrating on the four districts I had decided to study for this dissertation. For instance, while I was recording good program practices I would express my concerns to my supervisors when I felt they were going in the wrong direction. This made me feel at times that I was becoming too involved and critical in very specific program issues.

Interviews

According to Fontana and Frey (2005) both qualitative and quantitative research tend to rely on the interview as the basis of the data collection process, "whether the purpose is to obtain a rich, in-depth experiential account of an event or episode in the life of the respondent or to garner a simple point on a scale." (p.698) Interviewing, they add, "is inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound" (p.695) Therefore, we cannot expect neutrality for scientific purposes using interviews. As they mention, "spoken or written words always have a residue of ambiguity."

Mertens (1998) explains that interviews can be structured or unstructured, group or individual. Yin (2003) adds a third type of interview to the list, the focused interview.

In structured interviews, not only are all respondents asked the same questions, but the order of the questions is almost identical. This inflexibility also affects the way the questions are answered. This type of interview is often found in surveys (Fontana &

Frey, 2005; Mertens, 1998; Yin, 2003). The answers are recorded following a pre-established coding system (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Since my participants play a variety of roles within the LUCHA program and I wanted to cover the different aspects that made the LUCHA program possible, the structured interviews would not have most appropriately served my purpose. I selected instead the unstructured interview format to gather primary data from my study participants.

The traditional type of unstructured interview is the open-ended, ethnographic interview usually linked to participant observation. Trochim (2001) explains that this type of interview involves "direct interaction between the researcher and a respondent or group" (p. 161).

A semi-structured interview, identified as a focused interview by Yin (1994) is an interview in which the respondent is interviewed for a short period of time. A significant characteristic of this interview format is that it may have open-ended questions that guide the respondent in a conversational manner. When used for a case study, this interview format is more likely to follow the conventional interview protocol. I found this kind of interview useful for follow-up questions, or when a particular incident took place and I wanted to get a variety of perspectives.

Unstructured and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data for this study. There are nearly 80 recorded hours of unstructured and semi-structured interviews from 55 participants collected during the two-year period of data collection. The vast majority of interviews were face-to-face interviews with individuals on site –UT Austin (12 participants), the South Texas Valley (27 participants), Mexico City, Veracruz,

and Monterrey, N.L., Mexico (16 participants); although, some interviews were conducted via telephone. Group interviews were used with students. The advantage of group interviewing was that students felt more at ease, since they were more likely to express their feelings in the company of their peers (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Because every person interviewed had a different story to tell about the program, the interview protocols were to some extent tailored to each specific interviewee. I generally performed some research before interviewing my participants to best use the time available for the interviews and to be sure my interview questions got to the heart of their particular role in the LUCHA program. (See Appendix A)

Some interviews were carried out in English, some in Spanish, and some in both languages, depending on the wishes and comfort of the person who was being interviewed. Lengthy, hour to an hour-and-a-half interviews were carried out with the research participants in their language of choice or in both English and Spanish in both Mexico and the U.S. during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years. Some interviews were significantly shorter. My experience as a bilingual researcher and interviewer was similar to that of Perez (2007) in that many of those interviewed used both languages during the same interview, which facilitated "candid communication which evoked unique contributions to the subject matter" (p.92).

Field Notes and Researcher's Log

Notes taken during the participatory ethnographic observation are called field notes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Field notes represent a way to record everything about an observation in the field. For example, I wrote extensive field notes during the three weeks I spent in May 2008 visiting the three school districts in the South

Texas Valley and interviewing staff from the fourth school district I studied for this dissertation. I recorded my observations of the interactions of UT staff with students, schools and school districts' staff, and anything else that caught my interest. I jotted diagrams in my field notes to better understand the LUCHA implementation design in the different districts. During my data collection, I would enter my observations and preliminary analysis of data recorded during the events or as soon after it was feasible. This data became a valuable source of information during the data analysis stage.

Documents

Documents are ready-made source of easily accessible data (Merriam, 1998; Trochim, 2001). Usually this refers to existing documents rather than transcripts of interviews conducted for research. In our contemporary world, these 'documents' includes newspapers, magazines, books, videos, Web sites, memos, transcripts of conversations, annual reports, all of which informed this research (Trochim, 2001). Since LUCHA is a program that sells products, I also studied promotional material, testimonials and reports specifically about LUCHA and its services. Mertens (1998) recognizes the necessity of documents for the qualitative researcher to get as complete a picture as possible of the study subject through a variety of documented sources.

> The qualitative researcher must turn to these documents and records to get the necessary background of the situation and insights into the dynamics of everyday functioning. The researcher cannot be in all places at all times; therefore, documents and records give the researcher access to information that would otherwise be unavailable. (p.324)

I needed to ask many questions in order to answer my two over-arching research questions in this dissertation, and this called for use of a wide range of documentary material.

Data Analysis

According to Merrian (1998), data analysis is the complex process of making meaning out of the data going back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation. This dissertation is a holistic description and analysis of the LUCHA program. In the analysis, I moved beyond a basic description of the case to a more complex analysis creating categories and subcategories through the constant comparative method of data analysis. I used a coding system that started with themes that emerged from the data validating them though the method of triangulation. In this section, I address the following methodological considerations: coding, validation, and researcher's roles.

Coding

According to Charmaz (2005), "Coding is the method of connecting data, issues, interpretations, data sources, and report writing" (p.451). The coding phase forces the researcher to define the action in the data statement. Coding refers to making comparisons, usually side by side placing data against data, data with categories, category with category. Coding is "active, immediate and short and focuses on defining action, explicating implicit assumptions, and seeing processes" (p.517). In this study, an initial open coding was done from data that includes interview transcripts, documents, and researcher's log and field notes. Comparison of data with data contributed to triangulation and led to the next step, axial coding in the form of diagrams (Mertens, 1998). For example this process led me to hypothesize about the impact of cultural

similarities among participants, and on common concerns of study participants on the education of immigrant youth in U.S. schools.

Validation

To reduce the possibility of misinterpretation I triangulated my data. Triangulation refers to the checking of information collected from several sources and methods in data collection for consistency, as well as applying various methodological lenses to the material in order to bring validity to the findings (Denzin, 1978, 1989).

I also read many documents that were generated by and reported on the program. In addition, I conducted follow-up interviews to clarify certain perspectives or points of fact. When it was time to stop collecting data after two and a half years working in the program, I began analyzing the data in relation to the implementation and aims of the binational project and the realities of the service provided to four school districts. Themes were brought into sharper focus by analyzing the variety of data I had from each school district first and then comparing district with district, program implementation with program implementation.

Researcher Roles

In qualitative research, the researcher plays different roles (Merriam. 1998). The roles I chose to enact as a researcher include: researcher as researcher, researcher as a learner, and researcher as a filter of information.

Researcher as Researcher - I sought employment at the K-16 Education Center in order to have access to the LUCHA program and to make a contribution to the improvement of the situation of many adolescent immigrants from Mexico. I wanted to research the educational programs of Mexico and the United States and I found the perfect match to

my research interest in this program. It was clear since the beginning of my working relationship that my intentions were to do doctoral research in the LUCHA program. According to Glesne (2005), "All of the places in which you present yourself communicate to others how a researcher acts" (p.41). I identified myself as a researcher before I started to work at the education center and all staff was aware of my researcher's role.

Researcher as a Learner - The researcher is also a learner. For Rossman and Rallis (2003), "Qualitative research begins with questions; its ultimate purpose is learning" (p.4). For Glesne (2005) a researcher becomes a learner when s/he acknowledges that has questions and others can help him/her answer them.

> …You are a curious student who comes to learn from and with research participants. You do not come as an expert or authority. If you are so perceived, then your respondents will not feel encouraged to be as forthcoming as they can be. As a learner, you are expected to listen; as an expert or authority, you are expected to talk. The differences between these two roles are enormous. (p. 41)

I consider myself a perpetual learner and my position as a researcher adds to this perception. The experience of working in an education center was new to me; moreover, working in a program where daily interactions have to do with education of two countries. I came to the program with many questions, which, as I began to answer them through the process of this investigation, prompted yet other questions. At the arbitrary end of this study, I am left with new questions, which I also hope to answer in the future.

Researcher as an Agent of Change - My role as a participant observer in this research allowed me to be an agent of change. I was hired as a graduate research assistant (GRA), a graduate student job, to help with the growing demands of the LUCHA program. At

work, when I heard about any feasible ideas that helped improve the process of a program in its formative stages, I lent my support. For the most part, due to the collaborative nature of the LUCHA team and the vast experience it brought to the effort, these ideas were generally well accepted and implemented. Havelock's (1973) notion of a change agent in education being someone who was able to bring about innovation is one that I and other LUCHA employees, as well as student participants continue to embrace.

Researcher as a Filter of Information - A researcher acts as a filter of information while to some extent bound by the content of the research and positionality of the researcher. The potential fruits of this research have special meaning for me because I am a bilingual, bicultural educator who has lived and worked in both countries; therefore my perspective is critical yet hopeful about the possibilities to bolster education of a population I care about. First of all, I am Mexican and learned English as a second language in Mexico. Therefore, I speak with an accent and I'm identified as a minority as soon as I speak a word of English in the U.S. Second, I have been exposed to the education school system of both countries. Before finishing high school in Mexico, I came to the U.S. for a semester to learn English in a northern high school and was placed in an ESL program where I was banned from taking challenging core courses because I did not speak English well. I later earned a master's in English as a Second Language in the U.S., and am currently a PhD Candidate at UT Austin. My children have been exposed to both educational systems as well. For a number of years, our family lived in a U.S. border town and my children attended elementary school there. My grandson is Mexican American and goes to a public school in the U.S. I am very interested in the outcome of

this research because it involves both of the countries I love and where my immediate family continues to live.

I have to be honest and say that I respect and understand the Chicano sentiment of union, *raza*, and oppression; however, I myself do not feel I am a Chicana. Even though I have transnational experiences, I continue to be more rooted in Mexican culture than that of the U.S. I acknowledge thou that my feelings for the Chicano culture have changed throughout my study, and I anticipate an even more profound appreciation and understanding of my grandson's world in the future. I consider it impossible to maintain the same researcher's initial position toward a culture when you come to understand it with more depth.

Other personal motivations involve my background as a life-long educator. I believe that providing educational opportunities in a caring environment rather than neglecting the potential of immigrant students will benefit society. "Research should have the goal of improving some social circumstance, whatever form that takes" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). It is my hope that this research contributes to knowledge towards this goal.

Limitations of the Study

This investigation seeks to study the history, emergence, development, implementation and maintenance of an educational program that operates through binational cooperation agreements between Mexico and the U.S. There is the hope that the program will continue to evolve and be able to expand to many sites in the United States. All observations of a critical nature are made with the hope that they will serve to improve the quality of the program from its products, to its collaborators in the schools,

the supporters at UT and all the students who it hopes to serve. As a researcher, I see a limitation of the study in the inability of the researcher 'to know it all'. Although I consider myself a suitable person to engage in this kind of study because of my binational background, a complex phenomenon such as the emergence and maintenance of the LUCHA program could be studied and explained through many different perspectives. Inevitably, the researcher's perspective is limited to a single person's perspective and interpretation of the data.

Another limitation of this study is the limited access to information that I have while working as a graduate research assistant at the education center. I do not have access to all spaces where negotiations between the two countries occur nor do I have direct access to the implementation process of the program. The place where most of my work is done is in the headquarters of the LUCHA program. Therefore, the study is limited to issues I can study in depth that I believe will bring some light to the social and political concern of educating the increasing Mexican English learning student population in the U.S.

Chapter 4: *Building Binational Cooperation in Education*

Introduction

In this chapter I will present the data and findings that relate to the first of the two questions posed in this dissertation that is What challenges had to be met in order to initiate and develop the LUCHA program, a binational education program to combat the high dropout rate among Latino immigrants.

In the introduction of this chapter, I would like to restate some important things that have to do with my position as a researcher. First, it is imperative that the reader of this dissertation consider the whole context in which the events described herein took place. The historical moment we live in where on the one hand, minorities are visible. In the U.S. President Barak Obama is a minority of African American descent. As president, he nominated Judge Sonia Sotomayor to be a judge of the U.S. Supreme Court. Her confirmation marked the first time that a member of the Hispanic minority in the U.S has served on this court. On the other hand, there is an ongoing and overt display of hostility against immigrants who have become the scapegoat of the U.S. economic downturn that started in 2008.

The LUCHA program, focus of this study, works with Mexico and with Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and educators of all nationalities in the U.S, all of whom join forces to work to improve the education and educational outcomes of a high school population for which, according to the Mexican government, both countries share responsibility. At

a time when the media focuses on differences and difficulties on the border, the people involved in the program have created ways to collaborate, first through bilateral agreements of cooperation on education, and consequently with the painstaking work required to put these agreements into practice.

As a researcher, it is my responsibility to be a critical thinker (Crotty 1998). Any problems that I bring to light in this study are presented in search of solutions. My research is motivated by my desire to find ways to strengthen the program not to find fault. I am not writing propaganda nor writing in the style of a public relations firm. Although I feel very protective of this educational initiative I believe in, I follow rigorous academic standards to interpret this complex binational phenomenon.

My ultimate hope is to provide a close examination of the program with its strengths, missteps and its admirable accomplishments to a wider audience. The program and its services will be presented as responses to the challenges that needed to be met in order to develop LUCHA and have it take an active role in improving the education of Mexican immigrant high school students.

Origins of the LUCHA Program

An examination of the services of the LUCHA program also brings out what was necessary from both countries, to make this service 'work' for the benefit of the target population in the United States. Even before the challenges and the search for ways to meet them, one visionary person believed that he had the means and opportunity to work on making one of his dreams for humanity come true. Dr. Felipe Alanis stated:

> My dream was to help these immigrant kids [from Mexico] succeed in school and don't drop out… Students get very discouraged when they are placed in lower grades not because they do not know the content of subject matters but because they do not speak the language. They lose motivation to continue studying when they end up in 9th grade with students much younger than they are and repeating courses they have already taken in their country… (Interview, July 2007)

With previous experience in education as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and an individual who has held the highest state rank of Secretary of Education of the state of Texas, Alanis, now Associate Dean at UT, was well positioned to spearhead the effort to create a binational effort. (Please note that this information was accurate at the time of the study, but that Doctor Alanis is no longer in that position.) He had a vast network of friends in key positions in both Mexico and the U.S., and since childhood spoke fluent Spanish. These experiences and attributes helped position him as a person with the requisite skills and social capital to seek institutional agreements between the Mexican official agency of the Institute of Mexican Abroad (IME), and a Tier 1 university in Texas (UT) where he was employed.

It was fortuitous that his goal to provide educational support to ELLs in the U.S. coincided with the Mexican government's overt intention to respond to the cry for support to improve education of Mexican and Mexican Americans in the U.S. Alanis came to Mexico to seek support at the right time. Mexico had already gone through binational cooperation efforts and with the experience gained was ready to help him.

Dr. Alanis thought of having a state level program that could be replicated or extended throughout the United States. He devised a plan. He knew he needed support from the Mexican government to reach his goal and searched for the right person to help

him. He approached the Mexican Consulate for help. He recalls his conversation with an official in the office of the Mexican Consulate in Austin when he told them he was looking for individuals to help him with the program. He said:

> I need to hire some people that are going to be models, that are going to be ambassadors from Mexico, are our best and brightest people… that we can say we can break the stereotype… We are all alike irrespective of where we come from, that our heart is in the right place about wanting to help children, that our people are believers. If I can attribute anything as far as being successful, that's been the personnel that we've hired, the staff that makes it work. Their heart is in it. (Interview, October 2007)

That person was Leo Reyes. (Please note, other than Dr. Alanis and Minister Carlos González Gutiérrez (CGG), the individuals, schools and school districts mentioned in this dissertation have been given pseudonyms.) Leo Reyes had been working at the Mexican Consulate in Laredo, Texas before joining Alanis' team as the LUCHA program coordinator. At the Consulate, he was in charge of the Mexican Communities Abroad program (programa de Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior), a program from the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs) known as SRE for its acronym in Spanish that started operating in 1990. This program was designed to promote ties between Mexican communities in their host countries and Mexico, and to provide support for Mexicans abroad in areas that include health, education, sports, culture, economic development and community organization.

Almost fifteen years later, in April 2003, Mexican President Vicente Fox Quezada continued the Mexican government's tradition of concern for Mexican citizens who were living in other countries. He signed a Decree establishing the *Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior* (Institute of the Mexicans Abroad) known as IME for its acronym in

Spanish. IME is a strategically planned government initiative to coordinate different government ministries in their effort to help Mexicans living abroad. Although IME combined two government initiatives –the two year old Representative Office for Mexicans Abroad and Mexican-Americans from the Office of the President, and the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad, this new entity has a different governance structure. It includes a body of 125 advisors known as *Consejo Consultivo del IME* who bring initiatives on issues related to Mexicans abroad. These council members, who can only be Mexican or Mexican-American, serve for a single term of three years.

The National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad known as *el Consejo del IME* is given authority by the Decree establishing the IME as a "permanent intersecretarial commission to make proposals that contribute to adopting policies and taking governmental actions designed to address the needs and demands of the Mexican communities abroad while at all times respecting the sovereignty and authority of their states of residence"(IME, 2003).

This is significant because both Reyes and Alanis were active members of the IME at some time. Reyes continued working at the Consulate when the IME replaced the Mexican Communities Abroad program, although his responsibilities did not change.

Alanis had very good connections with the Mexican government which served him well in his effort to develop his binational program. When Alanis searched for support from the Mexican Consulate in Austin to start his hiring process for the program, the Mexican Consul proposed him as a member candidate to *el Consejo del IME*. Alanis

was voted in and became a *Consejero del IME* for the years 2006-2008, which coincided with the first two years of the LUCHA program. Later, Alanis nominated Reyes who was elected as a *Consejero del IME* for the years 2008-2010.

As a *consejero*, Alanis became one of the many *"oidos del gobierno mexicano para conocer las demandas de las comunidades mexicanas en el exterior"* (ears of the Mexican government to know about the needs of the Mexican communities abroad) by the former IME director and founder, Carlos Gonzalez Gutierrez. (Interview, February 2008). A loud request that originated from the Mexican American communities to the Mexican government was for institutional support to create educational opportunities for Mexicans abroad. In response, the Mexican government established *Plazas Comunitarias* (Community Centers) across the U.S. to provide elementary and secondary adult education and job related skills training through the INEA and CONEVyT. INEA is the acronym for *Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos* (National Institute for Adult Education), and CONEVyT stands for *Consejo Nacional para la Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo* (National Council to Improve Life and Work Through Education). Both national institutions depend on the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Ministry of Public Education) and offer courses online in order to reach a wider audience. There was no initiative for high school students. Since the Mexican government was looking for ways to improve education at this level for Mexican students in the United State, Alanis' strategy to lower Hispanic dropout rate with the LUCHA program was the perfect fit.

Dr. Alanis had approached the Executive Director of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad at the right time because the IME had already organized the binational efforts of the different ministries and government agencies.

The IME is under the umbrella of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE) and it coordinates the different Mexican Ministries or Secretariats that serve Mexican communities abroad. To start, the IME provided a framework to organize the different activities of official agencies and Ministries with binational projects. "*El IME nos ordenó…andaba suelto todo mundo*" (The IME organized us… everybody was acting alone and on their own,) said the former Colegio de Bachilleres director. The historical context of that time cannot be overlooked**.** The remittances Mexico was receiving from the U.S. had already surpassed 10,000 million dollars per year and this was one of the reasons that the Mexican origin groups in the U.S. became powerful. They were able to exert significant pressure on Mexican state governors to provide assistance to deal with the challenges they faced in the U.S. Dr. Arredondo stated:

> *…las necesidades fueron canalizadas a través de la Secretaría (SRE), y nos mandó llamar a todos, a los que dábamos servicios educativos, a los que dábamos servicios de salud, a los que dábamos servicio social.*
>
> …the needs were channeled through the *Secretaría* (SRE), and it summoned everybody, those of us who provided educational service, the ones that provided health services, the ones that provided social service…

Dr. Alanis' position as Associate Dean of the University of Texas' K-16 Education Center**,** a division of the Continuing and Innovative Education, provided the institutional experience and support needed to begin his fledgling program. The Center was comprised of specific departments which provide services to educational institutions

which serve non-traditional student populations. These populations include migrant students, 20,000 of whom have benefited through the Migrant Student Graduation Enhancement Program in the last 25 years. The students bear no costs for this program. Another student population is comprised of students including those who reside in other countries, who need or prefer to attend high school through a distance-learning experience; they can attend and graduate from the UT High School on line. Tuition and other fees are charged for this service (UT Austin, 2006).

From the beginning, Alanis saw the necessity to operate from within the University of Texas as he recognized that the institution could provide credibility and stability to the project on the United States side. The wealth of existing distance learning resources he could incorporate from other departments at the K-16 Education Center, where he was the director, served his new program well. He also recognized that the university had a responsibility to serve this population of immigrant students and stem the dropout rate. At the same time, he was determined to combat the deficit thinking that was one of the roadblocks to helping these students reach their full potential. The University of Texas could help bolster the social capital and the opportunities of recent immigrant students. The specific situation of immigrant Mexican students and their lack of social capital in perspective is addressed by Yosso (2005) when she cited Garcia and Guerra (2004) in the following statement:

> Indeed, Garcia and Guerra's (2004) research acknowledges that deficit thinking permeates U.S. society, and both schools and those who work in schools mirror these beliefs. They argue that this reality necessitates a challenge of personal and individual race, gender and class prejudices expressed by educators, as well as a 'critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational

> inequities for students from nondominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. (p. 155)

More specifically, Jackson (2009) affirms the perspectives of Friere and others who emphasize that education is not a neutral process. This is nowhere more apparent than in language acquisition when combined with working with immigrant students from Mexico, particularly during these years of sometimes rabid anti-immigrant sentiment. However, it should be pointed out, that there are many devoted teachers and advocates for these students. Valdés (2001) expresses at least one explanation for the sluggish progress that these students have made.

> Individuals of good will are not always aware that they have become instruments of dominant interests. They are seldom conscious of the fact that power is exercised both through coercion and through consent and that, in many cases, people 'consent' to preserving the status quo and to maintaining existing power relationships simply by accepting established practices without question. (p. 155)

LUCHA represented a commitment from actors in both countries, that this 'consent' would not go unchallenged.

In discussing the very beginnings of LUCHA Alanis said, "This is where we started, how do we fill that gap? How do we as a university try to fill in that gap?" Furthermore, he recognized the potential that technology, which had been used both in Mexico and the United States for distance learning, seemed to be an asset to be investigated. Dr. Alanis posits,

> How could we help in the schools using the technology that we have today? And so when we realized that Mexico has web-based high school courses we thought, would it be possible to make these courses serve as a bridge? A) an academic content bridge, and B) a cultural bridge because the student feels a sense of self-worth and self-esteem if he's studying something that he acknowledges, recognizes and validates his sense of

> being. And because we had the experience here dealing with these web-based courses in English we thought well let's marry the two. Let's use our expertise and our knowledge and get together with Mexico. (Interview, July 2007)

In spite of Dr. Alanis' position and qualifications and in spite of his social and cultural capital, it was not always a smooth road from his idea to an agreement between the University of Texas and the Mexican government. He recalls,

> Just to sign an agreement was very, very difficult. Because to get the university who has historically and traditionally been very cautious about dealing with other countries… And I think, some of it is lacked with the misconception that whatever comes south might be inferior, or less quality than, or not equal to, then you have that, I think, bias, built-in perception from both sides, from both sides… politically we have an immigrant issue, that ideology, some ideology does not favor, want or feel like it is encouraging more immigration rather than less. And so the difficult part is that once the program is established they start criticizing it as what are you doing, are you pampering? Are you encouraging? Are you giving more? Are you giving them something that they don't deserve... that is the tough part, the timing. If there were different times where relations were great and immigration wasn't coming in hoards and all of that, it probably would have been a better time, but that was the tough part. (Interview, December 2008)

To get the program started took a great deal of patience and tenacity. Dr. Alanis continued,

> Yes, about a year. I think we worked on it, and we worked on it, and we worked on it. And I think, the hardest part for me was if we take, I think we always had positive feedback on the document, on the memorandum of understanding. And we thought that we had it all cleared. But there were just some issues that came up at the last minute, and that was difficult to resolve, difficult to resolve in our system. Not that they weren't in favor of the program, but details that we thought were worked out, and we didn't know until the end that they needed to be approved by areas of the university that we weren't aware of.
>
> The difficulty was to try to get, in concept the idea was okay, when we got down to writing the agreement both at the Mexico side and the American here at the university then it became very problematic. Because Mexico

had an idea in their mind about what the agreement ought to be …they had a sample, like a template. And we started with a template and then filled in our piece based on what we thought we could live with, all along sending it to the channels here, contracts and grants and up the line. And once we got okays we continued, green lights, and we continued to hash it out.

Then Mexico started questioning, their lawyers said this word won't fly, this word won't fly, what about this, can't we do this. And we came back and changed it and every time we changed it the people over here started getting more frustrated and upset about, why are they telling us what to do, we're UT, we're the university. And then they started picking at it word by word, the words, the little words, two words or three words, the concepts. And going back and forth between their legal and our legal was painstaking. And then as (name omitted) points out, even right before the agreement was signed they were telling us, well such and such the board of regents needed to sign it because it is international. And we had never been told that before. And the other key issue was if there was a conflict – will it be solved in an international court which is what Mexico wanted. And the university was saying, no we are the court, and when you deal with the United States nobody, other courts don't have a say it's got to be here. And so that was a very sticky point that we had to end up having a completely different language where we left all of that out and finally got it passed. But the good news was it was finally accepted." (Interview, December 2008)

Transcripts from Mexico – Where Culture and Language Collide

A service that clearly shows the challenges as well as the collaborative efforts of the two countries to improve the education of the Mexican immigrant student population in the U.S. is that of obtaining transcripts from Mexico. Schools request LUCHA to obtain a transcript from Mexico to have the historical academic record of the newcomer and/or to elaborate a transcript analysis and aid counselors with student grade placement. When Dr. Alanis first met with the Mexican government asking for collaboration, he encountered a very positive response. "Something I have to say about Mexico is that they have been very helpful. They just told us, what is what you need? Tell us so that we can

help you," said Alanis (Interview, October 2007). The IME executive director met with the UT liaison in Mexico City to discuss the kind of support UT needed. Afterwards, a message from the IME was sent to the state education offices to ease the UT liaison's job to obtain transcripts and curricula from the Mexican states. "*El IME nos ha brindado una ayuda tremenda. Desde el principio cuando vino el Dr. a entrevistarse con el Ministro Carlos González Gutiérrez, el inmediatamente giro órdenes."* (The IME has offered us an enormous amount of help. From the beginning, when the Dr. came to an interview with Minister Carlos González Gutiérrez, he immediately gave orders) (Interview, February 2008) the UT liaison said.

A Liaison in Mexico City

In order to analyze the curricula of Mexican high schools, that curricula needed to be obtained. There also needed to be a liaison to help facilitate the location and proper disposition of transcripts that immigrant students needed to be sent to the LUCHA program for evaluation. In contrast to the United States school system in which individual states maintain a lot of control over the curriculum and other critical matters, in Mexico, all of the major decisions that affect educational instruction and administration come from Mexico City. The need to have someone in Mexico working for UT became evident and since in Mexico, government offices are centralized and most are located in Mexico City, a person living in that city was the most convenient and culturally appropriate candidate.

Mr. Reyes, the LUCHA coordinator, had the Mexican contacts that could help him in his search for an experienced government supervisor that could help him with the

LUCHA program. Mr. Reyes emphasized that this person needed to be acceptable to both the Mexicans and those working in the United States, someone who knows how decisions are made and a person who was completely credible and trustworthy. (Conversation with Mr. Reyes, July 2007)

Through a frank request of Dr. Alanis to Minister Carlos González Gutiérrez, who at that time was the Executive Director of the IME, the UT liaison received full support from the different government agencies to obtain transcripts and official documents needed for LUCHA to process and provide service to U.S. school districts.

After three years of operation, the UT liaison network in Mexico is vast. Most Mexican states have helped LUCHA in some way. (See Figure 3. Map of Mexico) The map and the effort they represents dispel the common but erroneously held notion that this is simply a border program, or that the students who attend school in the Valley are only from Northern Mexican states that border the United States.

Figure 3. Map of Mexico. Darker shade indicates the Mexican states that have collaborated with the LUCHA program (K-16 Ed. Center, 2009)

Like other services that LUCHA offers, that of obtaining a transcript from Mexico has been refined and adjusted over time. Although not perfect, a lot of the success in this process is due to the information gathering system LUCHA has now in place. This process was the result of a myriad of bicultural-binational encounters within the LUCHA staff members. For example, the preparation of the Online Enrollment System forms where the prior academic information of the student is requested was in a way a painstaking and long process.

One might think that the main challenge of acquiring transcripts and analyzing their contents in a timely way rests with the academic experts, the process of requesting transcripts points out another daunting challenge, that of cultural differences between the

two countries as reflected in language. This is particularly tricky in relations between Spanish-speaking Latinos in Texas and Mexicans whose only language is Spanish, and whose cultural frame of reference is Mexican. A challenge is to overcome the resistance, whether conscious or otherwise, of the actors in one country to the customs and manners of the other.

My field notes from that time record the experience.

> Problems with the forms the counselors make: the names
> Comment… I suggested using a dash between the father's and other last names, since we need to adapt to the culture where we are situated. It was well accepted. Leo commented that he had had too many problems making people understand that we Mexicans have two last names. He commented on a teacher at Ryan High School that when they were looking at student cases she naively commented, "Look, she has a mother's last name as well". He just thought, "Haven't you got it? We all Mexicans have two last names…" We discussed that maybe if we would make these counselors and teachers understand that in Mexico it is by law to use two last names, they would start writing the two last names in the forms for which we have so much trouble with misplaced information regarding names and last names. Even Laura, in Mexico, sometimes starts searching for the wrong person because the student's last name was written as if it was the middle name. (Field Notes, January 2008)

The LUCHA Mexican staff could not get across the fact that we needed two fields to request students' last names. We would encounter opposition to any change to the system that in this case only had one field to enter student's last name. We needed two fields, one for the father's last name and one for the mother's maiden name. The IT team at the UT K-16 Center did not permit changes to the database system to accommodate LUCHA's request. We only had one field available for the students' last names, so the only option we had at that time was to ask for both last names and to place a hyphen between them.

We encountered resistance every time we asked for anything that was not known to most people, for example those who have knowledge and experience of the school system in the U.S. but not of the way things work in Mexico. For example, in Mexico, most public schools have shifts. The school shifts are *matutino, vespertino* and *nocturno* (morning, afternoon, and night shift). Although these shifts sound like working shifts, they actually refer to the time frames in which distinct schools operate in the same location, using the same buildings, but at different times. The need to have school shifts comes from a strained federal and state budget for education and the need to use the same buildings for different schools. This need shortens the school schedule to four and a half hours of school a day. The combination of schools in the same buildings vary, but usually you could find two elementary schools during the day that share the a building with a *secundaria* at night or a *secundaria* that shares the building with *preparatoria* , but there are not preparatorias that use the same space as elementary schools. An example of a shared school building is as follows: A school might have a *secundaria* in the morning shift from 8:00am to 12:30, a *preparatoria* in the afternoon shift from 1:00pm to 5:30pm, and another *preparatoria* in the night shift from 5:45pm to 10:15pm. The student's shift is important to LUCHA when a request to obtain a transcript is received. As with all other relevant information to obtain transcripts, the importance of this need took some time to communicate in a way that maintained good relations and ultimately produced the desired results.

Transcript Analysis

Even before the service of retrieving transcripts from Mexico was put into place, the first and often deemed the most important service LUCHA offers was that of transcript analysis. In the beginning, the transcripts analyzed were those that students brought with them when they arrived at their United States high school. Before this service was implemented, the overwhelming majority of recent immigrants from Mexico were not given any recognition in Texas for the academic work they had successfully completed in their own school. They did not speak English, and for this reason were forced to start U.S. high school in the 9th grade, regardless of their education in Mexico. These students were taking courses they had already completed and placed with students sometimes many years their junior. For them, this meant not only going back a year or several years in school because they do not have the language, but the humiliation of being back in *secundaria*, which for them was an achievement already celebrated, a goal already achieved. It is comparable to placing a student ready to enroll in 3rd grade back in pre-primary, or relegating a student already in high school to middle school.

"The first challenge to solve this problem was to find and make the necessary arrangements with Mexico and school districts to have the immigrant students' schooling credited in the U.S. schools", said Alanis (Interview March 2007).

> The whole system of evaluation had to bridge the gap between the Mexican educational system and that of the United States. One system can not be literally translated into the culture of the other. There are profound differences. For Mexican students, the idea of completing high school requirements through passing a number of credits was as foreign as the country that required it. In Mexico, students need to pass six semesters to graduate, and each semester with its variety of courses is one single block of education.

The transcript analysis UT performs is a blessing to high school counselors**,** most of whom do not understand the Mexican school system nor are they familiar with the Mexican transcripts. Basic education is different in each country. In Mexico, basic education ends in *3o. de secundaria*, whereas in the U.S. it ends in 12th grade. A brief illustration of how the educational systems are so different can be found in the school year equivalency. Elementary school in Mexico is from 1st to 6th grade, while in the U.S. it is 1st to 5th; middle school in Mexico is called *la secundaria* and covers three school years equivalent to 7th, 8th, and 9th grade, whereas in the U.S. middle school is from 6th through 8th grade. High school in Mexico is called *la preparatoria* and covers the U.S. equivalent of 10th to 12th grade (and most *preparatorias* have a 6 semester plan), while in the U.S. high school refers to grades 9th to 12th. More often than not, teachers and counselors do not know this piece of information. In response to this information gap, when planning the LUCHA service request form online, the following table to request Mexican transcripts was prepared.

If the student has completed	Request from LUCHA™
2° *de Secundaria* (U.S. 8th grade)	2° *de Secundaria*
3° *de Secundaria* (U.S. 9th grade)	3° and 2° *de Secundaria*
1er *año de Preparatoria* (U.S. 10th grade)	1er *año de Preparatoria* and 2 prior years
2° *año de Preparatoria* (U.S. 11th grade)	2° *año de Preparatoria* and 3 prior years
3er *año de Preparatoria* (U.S. 12th grade)	3er *año de Preparatoria* and 4 prior years

Table 1. Mexican-U.S. grade equivalency and transcript request

The transcript analysis service provides guidance to school districts on questions of student grade placement, the granting of credits, and courses the student can take in

Spanish for credit while they transition into English. A student can advance from a sophomore (9th grade in the U.S.) to a junior (11th grade in the U.S.) depending on the number of credits LUCHA recommends that the school accept for credit based on the successful completion of high school courses that the student already took in Mexico. Of course a school needs to accept LUCHA's recommendations for this process to be completed. A teacher can request that LUCHA obtain the student's transcripts from Mexico and ask UT to develop a transcript analysis. The sooner this service is completed, the faster credits can be awarded to the student and a new course schedule can be worked out.

The student's life changes dramatically and his/her self-esteem is bolstered when the hard school work that the student completed before coming to the U.S. is recognized through credit applied toward high school graduation in the United States. Furthermore, they have the opportunity to learn new material.

Several cultural differences with respect to the perception of how certain documents are valued in both countries, work against Mexican arrivals in U.S. schools. It is often observed that when a newly arrived Mexican immigrant enrolls in school in the U.S. that student brings his/hers *secundaria* certificate to prove that he/she has finished the equivalent to 9th grade in Mexico. These students and their families are unaware of the school policies and perspectives in the U.S., and therefore believe that the *secundaria* certificate will have the significance, weight and meaning in U.S. schools that it holds in Mexican schools. It is a stark and confusing moment when parents and students soon realize that they cannot move forward to enroll a student in 10th grade if they do not bring

the *secundaria* transcripts. The difference in the meaning of this legal document is that in Mexico, a *secundaria* certificate cannot be issued if the student has not finished all the requirements of basic education –elementary and secondary school requirements (www.sep.gob.mx). It holds a higher standing than the transcript, since it proves that the student has been released of previous obligations with the secondary school –dues, and incomplete courses. In the U.S., a *secundaria* certificate is accepted as justification to enroll a student again in 9th grade when the student is an English learner. Parents soon learn that high school completion requires an amount of course credits and that it is difficult that their children entering high school will be credited for the high school courses they already had.

LUCHA's task was to compare the Mexican high school curricula, which is not standardized across the nation, with the TEKS which is applicable to all of Texas to determine which courses are equivalent to the Texas high school courses and which ones are not. With this analysis, LUCHA could recommend the specific student credits that should be awarded in the transcript analysis of each student.

UT has staff that is knowledgeable of both the Mexican and United States school systems, Mexico and the U.S. There are individuals who analyze the course content from the Mexican high school the student transcripts come from in order to compare these courses' contents with the essential elements of the TEKS. With this analysis, the student's grades from Mexico are compared to the Texas high school graduation requirement courses. That is, if the student already took *Matemáticas I* in Mexico and the content and the skills learned in this course, in the student's specific *preparatoria*, are at

least 70% aligned with the U.S. Algebra 1 course in Texas academic standards (TEKS), then the grade the student obtained in *Matemáticas I* is recommended as the grade for Algebra I. The same is true for all the Mexican high school courses. One of the advantages of this LUCHA service is that most of the students coming from Mexico at high school age have already finished *secundaria* (equivalent to 9th grade) for which UT usually recommends at least 7 credits. On average, there is one credit per class per year. If we consider that in four years of high school in Texas a student has to complete 26 credits to graduate, when 7 credits are granted, it mean that the student may enroll in 10th grade rather than in 9th grade. This move allows students to be in school one year less, which saves the student and the school precious time, resources, and money. Everyone wins when a student is kept in school less time and is still able to graduate from high school.

Dr. Alanis was accurate and astute in identifying how to meet a critical challenge when he reasoned that validating courses previously studied in Mexico for recent arrivals could benefit a large population of ELLs and the schools where they were enrolled, but in the beginning he did not have a clear cut plan to accomplish this goal. The complexity of the task can be seen not only by the structure of two education systems, but the complication of cultural content and organization.

This initial goal of granting credit in the United States for courses completed in Mexico highlighted some of the binational challenges had to be overcome. For example, Mexico has a national curricula for *primaria*, and *secundaria*, but not for *preparatoria* (SEP, 2009). There are over 350 different high school programs with variations in course

content. The Mexican government had to agree to cooperate with UT LUCHA to create the path of information flow between the different schools and universities that provide academic information to LUCHA.

Even though a *preparatoria* or high school diploma in Mexico acknowledges the three years of study after *secundaria,* the differences in the curricula of the Mexican high schools require the meticulous analysis of each course. For example, the Preparatoria CBTIS 246 in Chihuahua compared to *Preparatoria* from Prof. Miguel F. Martínez in the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon has a different homology of math courses content. That is, *Matemáticas I-IV* might cover the same content in two different Mexican high school programs, but the specific course of *Matemáticas II* might include content from *Matemáticas III* of the other school curricula.

Besides that difference, the same *preparatoria* might have offered two programs. For example, a student who studied two semesters of prepa in the *Preparatoria XXX* in 2006-2007 studied under one curricular plan, whereas a student who studied the first two semesters in the same *preparatoria* in 2008-2009 studied under a newer curricular plan. In that case, LUCHA has to analyze both plans to properly recommend credits for each student.

To further complicate this challenge, Mexico's Ministry of Education announced an educational reform for *Educación Media Superior* commonly known as *preparatoria* in 2007 (SEP, 2007a.) Curricula are required to be documented with specifics that state the academic knowledge and skills students need to master for each course. Even though this is similar to the TEKS, the change represents double work for LUCHA, since the

curricula already analyzed for different Mexican high schools will need to be reviewed anew. New consensus between the LUCHA specialists in U.S. curricula and the staff specialized in Mexican school curricula has to be reached for *preparatorias'* curricula that were previously analyzed.

The fact that the information LUCHA gathers on course curricula of the *preparatorias* in Mexico is not standardized complicates the analysis. This points out a situation where even if what the student from Mexico has been taught, has learned and 'knows' may be equivalent to that of a student in the United States, the mentality and perspective which explains or documents this knowledge by way of a course description differs, and in the United States, accountability is often synonymous with uniformity.

The Mexican system might ask *preparatorias* to send the course curricula in a standardized format, but the information send to LUCHA does not show this format. Nevertheless, to make the course comparison of Mexican courses with the TEKS, the LUCHA staff has to adapt and work with what is available to them. Even though the course curricula received from Mexico might not show all the specific essential knowledge and skills taught in the courses, more often than not it is obvious to the Mexican staff that analyzes the curricular contents that there is content in the courses that is not listed in the documents.

The situation further demonstrates the critical importance of the funds of knowledge that the Mexican staff at LUCHA brings to their work, which bridges the cultural gap. "There is a blessing that there is Mexican staff in the LUCHA program to be fair to Mexican students' high school revalidation in the U.S.", says Mr. Reyes, LUCHA

coordinator. “I just cannot imagine making these comparisons with staff that have not been exposed to the Mexican school system. This wouldn’t work,” he adds. Because the Mexican staff knows the Mexican school system, arguments to back up their inferences on some Mexican curricula come to the discussion table. This refers to the fact that many times some themes are not explicit and overtly explained in the Mexican course curricula but it is obvious to the LUCHA staff that the teaching of these themes and the expected mastery of certain skills are implicit.

“*Hacer lo que se necesita para realizar la comparación del currículo de las preparatorias de los dos países no es fácil. No por nada, nadie se avienta a hacer ese trabajo*” (It is not an easy task to prepare the knowledge base for high school curricula comparison between two countries. It’s not for nothing that nobody wants to do it) acknowledges CGG, former IME executive director. “*LUCHA está haciendo este arduo y magnífico trabajo*” (LUCHA is doing this painstaking and commendable job), he adds.

For example, a transcript analysis is requested for a student with prior studies in *preparatoria* X. LUCHA might get a high school math course curricula from that *preparatoria* that obviates the distribution properties of binomials but includes the teaching of solving linear equations. Mexican staff analyzing the *preparatoria* curricula know that to solve this kind of equations, the student must be able to apply the distribution and commutative properties of the binomials, so this issue is noted and the obvious is considered as true.

The LUCHA staff in its totality then represents a hybridization of perception. Gonzalez (2005) in a chapter titled "Beyond Culture: The Hybridity of Funds of Knowledge" states:

> Increasingly, the boundedness of cultures gave way to an idea of the interculturality and hybridity of cultural practices. Often these concepts were predicated on examining borderlands, which are often riddled with emergent practices and mixed conventions that do not conform to normativity. (p. 37)

Evolution of the Transcript Analysis Service

The challenge of keeping up with a changing educational system is doubled in a binational effort. When the goal is to keep immigrant students in school and help them gain credit for work completed in their home country, small details must be addressed as they arise, or the students will again be pushed to the sidelines and valuable time will be lost while agencies and institutions quibble.

The transcript analysis LUCHA offers is presented to schools in a format that has undergone changes to make it a more useful and desirable product. At first, in the academic year 2006-2007 when LUCHA started operations, the transcript analysis was made up of fewer elements. It consisted of only one page and was called Transcript Analysis & Individual Graduation Plan (IGP). (See Appendix B) The courses completed in Mexico that had an equivalent to Texas course requirements were paired up with that Texas course. The grades earned in the courses the student took in Mexico as well as the credits earned that counted towards course revalidation were stated. A column with the LUCHA courses available for credit or for academic support that the student could benefit from was listed and paired by each U.S. course. Some LUCHA courses in

Spanish were recommended for credit because their curriculum was equivalent to the TEKS, and some others were recommended only as academic support.

In addition to all the information described, an account of credits was provided. A sum of the credits needed per subject area was kept on the right side of the form. And, a section of the IGP had a summary of credits required to graduate, credits earned, and credits needed to complete high school credit requirements. It was a document planned to help teachers and counselors map the student's route to graduation taking advantage of the availability of core courses in Spanish while the student made the transition to an all English curriculum.

In 2006-2007 academic year, the minimum number of credits TEA required for graduation was 22 in contrast to 26 credits required in the college track high school program (www.tea.state.tx.us). The LUCHA IGP form clearly set the plan for graduation with 24 credits. At this time, LUCHA's sole purpose with this IGP was to help the student graduate from high school and not to drop out.

The Challenge of Keeping Up with Change

In order for a binational effort to be effective and remain so, it must have the flexibility to be able to meet the challenge of change. This can prove particularly difficult when the partners must deal with the consequences of decisions made by entrenched and powerful bureaucracies such as TEA – the Texas Education Association.

Graduation requirements changed in Texas and the IGP had to change as well. With the inception of new requirements for graduation in 2007-2008, the bar was raised from 24 to 26 course credits in the Recommended Graduation Plan. School districts

complained that the information that they were receiving in the IGP was not accurate for all students because not all students followed the same graduation plan. So, school districts requested that the LUCHA transcript analysis form, the IGP, reflect these realities.

At the same time, LUCHA staff who worked with transcript analysis voiced the concern that immigrant students were not receiving any credit for subjects that were not recognized as TEA requirements. Many Mexican transcripts showed that students had been trained in areas of specialization that included nursing, computers, arts, agricultural science, carpentry and clothes manufacturing; nowhere in the transcript analysis could it be shown that the student had all this training. TEA only requires 3.5 credits of elective courses, and the IGP format did not have a place to let the teachers and counselors know that the student was proficient in other fields once those elective credits were fulfilled.

LUCHA staff wanted to create the most equitable situation possible for their students. They strongly believed that all course grades earned in Mexico should count towards the student's GPA (Grade Point Average.). As with transcripts generated from United States schools, it was necessary that the LUCHA analysis show the grades of courses the student did not pass in Mexico, as well as those in which the student was successful. Showing it all really proves the wealth of knowledge and skills these students bring with them and that this information is not cherry-picked to present the students in a false light. "We want school districts to recognize that these students do not come in a blank slate. They are all coming from a school system and bring knowledge with them,"

says Dr. Alanis (Interview, February 2008). An attuned staff with the LUCHA leader would push for the same goal. It was a time for change.

After many hours of LUCHA staff meetings and a lot of discussion to reach a consensus, a new transcript analysis was devised. The Graduation Credit Analysis (GCA) substituted the IGP. This new format is a lengthier and more complex version of the IGP. It has more columns and more sections than the older version (See Appendix C). Following the school districts' request, the transcript analysis could no longer mention the number of credits needed for graduation in the student's transcript analysis. Nevertheless, the GCA became a document where practically the total amount student's high school courses were given credit by mentioning them in the appropriate GCA section.

Courses taken in Mexico that count for credit in Texas because they are required courses toward high school graduation are displayed in the first section of the GCA as it was in the IGP before. Additional courses completed in Mexico that could count for credit because they have an equivalent Texas course are listed in the second section. Courses of this kind include: Accounting I, Engineering principles, Advertising Design I to III, Literary Genres, and Environmental Systems.

The third section of the GCA includes courses attempted in Mexico for which no credits are awarded. This is the section that lists all courses the student took but did not pass. The fourth section lists additional courses completed in Mexico that do not have a Texas equivalent course. These courses include: *Formación Cívica y Ética* (Civility and Ethics), *Obligaciones Fiscales* (Fiscal Obligations –Taxes), *Proyecto Emprendedor*

(Entrepreneurship Project), Business English, and *Medios Electrónicos* (Electronic Media.) Students who transfer to the U.S. in their junior year usually have information in at least three of the four sections of their GCA. A different attitude and perception of the student is generated in a counselor that can see the complete academic history of a newcomer to the school. One of the greatest achievements of the LUCHA program is that it gives irrefutable evidence that proves to teachers and counselors that the students coming from Mexico are intelligent and have knowledge and skills and the fact that they presently do not speak English cannot negate this reality.

In addition to the PEIMS number, which is the ID number of the TEA courses, information that already appeared in the IPG, LUCHA staff decided that it was also important to identify at what grade level the student took the courses listed in the different sections of the GCA. A column was added to specify the U.S. grade level equivalent of the Mexican grade level the student took the courses in Mexico. For example, if the student took the course equivalent to Electronics I in Mexico in the first year of *preparatoria*, then a 10 is shown. If the student took the equivalent to Advertising design III in Mexico in the 2nd year of *preparatoria*, then an 11 will be shown. With all these specifications in the transcript analysis the LUCHA team felt the transition of the student into the U.S. school system could be easier. Since much knowledge can be transferred from one language to another, if English is taught at school, the student can transfer the knowledge already acquired in Spanish and prepare to take the TAKS tests faster if he/she is not held back in a lower grade while English is acquired.

The Language Barrier – Beyond Literal Translations

Everyone would agree that when two parties in a binational relationship speak different languages, there must be accurate and objective translations of all language that passes between them. Most binational meetings have interpreter services available during the meeting, or texts available in both languages. Carrying meaning from one language to another is fraught with possible missteps, many of them completely inadvertent and unanticipated. (Doerr, 2009)

LUCHA students had enrolled in different types of *preparatoria* programs, which meant that when requesting information to obtain transcripts from Mexico, LUCHA staff needed to ask for the academic periods referring to *semestres*, *tetramestres*, or *bimestres* in which the student was enrolled. The staff assumed that the following statement in the online service request form would provide them with needed information but they were mistaken. The form read, "Provide the month and year the last enrollment period began." After several months, the LUCHA staff was frankly puzzled by the lack of response to this field. As I recorded in my notes,

> We raised our frustration in one of the meetings. Sure enough, we got an answer from one of the locals, a staff member from the Mexican American community. The word "period" does translate to *periodo*; the word is a cognate, but when referring to school's lingo, it means something different. "Period" in the U.S. refers to the class period that lasts from several minutes to several hours, whereas in Mexico the word "*periodo escolar*" refers to the academic year or the amount of time into which the *preparatoria* program is divided. It amazed me that even when we thought we were clearly requesting information about a specific semester, quarter, or bimester people still understood the word "period" in relation to class period. There was cultural misinterpretation of the wording of our forms due to what was standard language usage in each community. This made the information we requested confusing to them which explains the reason they would leave it blank. (Field Notes, May 2009)

"We cannot say that things are perfect yet, but by now things have changed and improved regarding our request forms," says a LUCHA staff member. We already have all the fields we need to facilitate the information gathering on the students and to request what we need from Mexico, but still the process can be improved," said the LUCHA coordinator (Interview, May 2009.)

Even after training about the LUCHA program, we often find that the district or school personnel filling out the LUCHA requests does not enter the complete student's name or enters it incorrectly. "It is a disservice to the students," a LUCHA member commented. Misspelled names go into databases; transcript requests are sent to Mexico; students are enrolled in courses and get grades with misspelled names when names were carelessly entered. Sometimes duplicate records exist for changing the name order or for providing the wrong information. I interpret this sloppiness as a lack of caring. "When something is not a priority, we might allow ourselves to be less careful. Maybe this is what's going on, and these students are not a priority to the person registering them in LUCHA" (Field notes, November, 2008).

The LUCHA Courses

The idea to start a high school intervention program for ELL Hispanic students sparked when Dr. Alanis observed a group of adult students taking online courses in Spanish at the UNAM branch in San Antonio, Texas. He saw the advantage of the online courses in that they were self-paced, they were in Spanish, and students could even get tutoring for the courses online through the courses' chat, discussion forums, and email.

After some inquiry on the courses, he found out that there were several Mexican providers of high school courses including Math and Science, core subjects where Hispanics as an ethnic group in the U.S. tend to get lower grades than the mainstream students. "This was perfect because students could take core courses in Spanish while they learn English without losing precious time at school," Dr. Alanis mentioned. "Students get frustrated when they are placed in a lower grade than the one they correspond because they lack English proficiency." (Interview, June 2007) The courses help students continue their studies at an academic level on par with the courses they were taking in Mexico without interruption.

In the field of education, the organization and the guidance the IME created fertile ground for binational collaboration. Dr. Arredondo, former director of Colegio de Bachilleres, recalls that time,

> *... así empezamos. En ese camino conocimos todo el trabajo organizado de ir a las diferentes reuniones que hay de educación bilingüe, de directivos de educación bilingüe que hay educación migrante, y vimos la oferta y vimos las necesidades de este... el mismo gobierno norteamericano, las mismas autoridades educativas norteamericanas saben, y sabemos juntos entonces que nos tenemos que ayudar, y que teníamos que compartir esto, y que ellos solos no lo podían hacer tampoco. Que no tenían tampoco la oferta de servicios locales para poder atender a toda esta población, y la creciente población en los estados emergentes como Alabama, o las Carolinas, Georgia, todo esto que está creciendo muchísimo de población mexicana y que se les desborda, y que no tienen gente que atienda.*
>
> … that's how we started. On this road we all (in Mexico) got to know the organizational work that involved attending the different conferences there were on bilingual education, management of bilingual education, migrant education and we became aware of what was available and the needs in this field… the same American government, and the American authorities in education know, we all know together, that we need to help each other, that we needed to share this, and that they could not do it alone either.

> That they do not have the needed local services to be able to serve everyone in this population, and the increasing population in emerging states like Alabama, the Carolinas, Georgia, all this (area) that is growing a lot with Mexican population that is overflowing, and that they do not have people to assist them. (Interview, June 2007)

Dr. Alanis had only praise when referring to the collaboration he received from the Mexican government. "We received a very positive response from Mexico. We have no complaints and a lot to thank. They have been most helpful," says Alanis. When Alanis presented his project and the requirements needed to carry out his program to the IME, they asked him, "…just tell us what you need, and we will help you… The IME summoned people from different official agencies that could provide the educational support Alanis requested. There were people representing the Ministry of Education (SEP for its acronym in Spanish of *Secretaría de Educación*), Politécnico Nacional, El Colegio de Bachilleres (this is a high school created by the SEP to aid students troubled with regular school schedule for different reasons), el INEA (National Institute for Adult Education), la UNAM (Mexican Autonomous National University), and TRALCOM (a multinational company that provides service to several Mexican official agencies.)

The question was who would be able to provide the service required to provide on-line high school education to Mexican immigrant students in Texas. El INEA wanted to collaborate; they already had the infrastructure to send radio and satellite signals to remote places in Mexico and had the experience since the 1980s of providing education to Hispanic inmates in bordering US states with Mexico through the program INEA–CONEVyT, which is adult education on content from elementary and middle-school curricula as well as training for life and work. *El Instituto Politécnico Nacional –*

preferred to stay on hold; it was just starting to develop online courses and felt unprepared to expand to the U.S.

The UNAM had an online high school program already in place and made an offer to provide it to UT. Unfortunately, the university could not adapt its program to other customers like students and schools in the U.S.; they could only offer online courses on set schedules aligned to the Mexican school calendar year which does not match the U.S. school calendar. To further complicate the situation, one of the requirements for participation in the courses was that each student have an email address to communicate with the tutor in Mexico. In the United States, it is against school policy for students to have email addresses at school that allow them to receive or send information outside the district's own system. So, their program was kept on hold as well. *El Colegio de Bachilleres* wanted to collaborate. They already had a complete high school program online, but lacked the necessary infrastructure to send the signal to the U.S. TRALCOM offer to work with *El Colegio de Bachilleres* and create the necessary systems if they could get 50% of the revenues in this endeavor. At the end, *El Colegio de Bachilleres* became the provider of high school courses for Alanis with the help of TRALCOM. El INEA provided a server to UT where the courses were housed at first.

Challenge – To Create a 'Brand' that Has Meaning and Energy in Both Countries

When Alanis started creating a brand name for this program with his team at UT they wanted to have a name with a catchy acronym, a word in English or in Spanish that would be symbolic and energizing to the people using it. Brand names are always important to a business product or service and Alanis was aware that the meaning had to

be significant to be able to stay. According to Cornejo Guerrero (2007), "*Las marcas evocativas son aquellas que sugieren idea de un producto o servicio, o de alguna de sus características o componentes"*(p. 122). (Evocative brand names are those that suggest the idea of a product or service or of some of its characteristics or components.)

A name was crafted in a manner that LUCHA was the acronym and the 'brand' of the program. LUCHA stands for Language Learners at the University of Texas at Austin Center for Hispanic Achievement. The word "*lucha*" has several meanings in Spanish; it means struggle and fight; it has the connotation of endurance at difficult time, and it is the nickname of the popular name "Guadalupe." Notes from my researcher's journal reflect my own initial reluctance to embrace the name when I first joined to program as a UT Graduate Research Assistant.

> I am a Mexican with formal education from Mexico, but I was once a Mexican immigrant student myself in Illinois. At that time, being a teenager in high school, the last thing I wanted was to be identified as a foreigner. These many years later, I felt that the name LUCHA would have that effect on the students and they were not going to like it. Beside, the word '*lucha*' has a negative connotation in Mexico because it means struggle and fight, and we Mexicans from Mexico do not like to be associated with fighting. (Researcher's journal, January 2007)

Dr. Alanis interpreted the meaning of the word in a different way, from a dissimilar perspective which was, in fact, closer to the meaning perceived by the students. "For us, LUCHA means the struggle the student goes through when he/she needs to adapt and succeed in a new educational system and with a different language," said Alanis. LUCHA became a registered trademark along with the UT high school online courses ASKME a year after they were on the market.

I should add that a later entry in my researcher's journal reflects my evolution and understanding of this word and its true meaning: "For me things have changed. The perception I had on the name LUCHA gave a 360-degree turn and now and I am the LUCHA person where I go and people know about the program" (Researcher's journal, February 2009).

The Challenge of Collaboration

Stewart Levine (2002) in his work "The Book of Agreement: 10 Essential Elements for Getting the Results You Want" states the following as his first Principle of Agreement: "The source of productivity and fulfillment in personal and professional relationships is effective collaboration. The more seamless the collaboration, the stronger the results" (p 16).

To attain and maintain this level of agreement, trust is an essential element and according to Cohen and Prusack (2001) "Social capital depends on trust."(p. 29) They further state: "The habit of collaboration—built on initial trust— creates more trust as people work together over time. The principle of collaboration is supported by the words and deeds of leaders and the sharing of credit"(p. 40).

The central players in these negotiations were already well-acquainted with each other, brought considerable social and cultural capital to the table and shared a commitment to the population they wished to serve. When LUCHA and *El Colegio de Bachilleres* began negotiations, LUCHA did not select all of the courses that were available on line, but only those that were most relevant and useful for the population they serve. The decision was to focus on courses in Math, Science, and English as a

Foreign Language. Although, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) does not sponsor bilingual programs that are intervention programs for high school ELL students, the TEA bilingual coordinator has been a strong supporter. TEA website's directory of addresses to bilingual directors, superintendents, principals helps disseminate information about the LUCHA program.

The Challenge to Offer Courses Aligned to the TEKS

In collaboration with Mexico, LUCHA keeps looking for ways to help ELL high school students. To this end, the program seeks to offer courses that are aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS.) In order to be able to recommend these courses for academic credit to school districts, it was desirable to have most of the core courses offered through the LUCHA program aligned at least 70% with TEA's academic standards, which are the basis of the courses and textbooks in Texas. Offering courses that could count towards graduation requirements would only help this effort. Students have a better chance to advance in high school graduation course requirements when they can continue learning core course content in their native language while they learned English. School districts could also benefit if students could understand and pass courses that were in the students' native language.

As Ing. Ramón de la Peña, former director of INEA and CONEVYT and former President of the I.T.E.S.M. in Monterrey said:

> *El conocimiento de conceptos es el mismo en cualquier lugar. Matemáticas es matemáticas aquí y en China…así igual para física, química y las demás materias. Si yo sé aplicar la ley de ___ de química en español, igual la puedo aplicar en inglés. El asunto es aprender el idioma.*

> Knowledge of concepts is the same everywhere. Mathematics is Mathematics here and in China… the same applies for Physics, Chemistry and the other subjects. If I know how to apply the chemistry law of __ in Spanish, I can also apply it in English as well. The point is to learn the language. (Interview, June, 2007)

Knowledge transfer to a different language has been the basis of Bilingual education programs in Texas at the elementary level. For high school students it translates to "a student in Texas learning chemistry in Spanish while he/she acquires the vocabulary to transfer that knowledge to English and eventually pass the feared exit level TAKS tests," as Ms Davis, the K-16 Associate Director commented (Interview, February 2008).

There were two course alignment projects of the Mexican courses with the TEKS that occurred almost simultaneously that dealt with the same list of courses. One project was headed by *El Colegio de Bachilleres* while the other took place at the K-16 Education Center at UT. LUCHA requested that these projects be done in both countries in order to validate and corroborate the results. For example, some Algebra courses met the TEA requirements as well as *El Colegio de Bachilleres*' standards.

In an effort to penetrate the U.S. high school market, *El Colegio de Bachilleres* designed additional online courses that would meet the academic standards set by the U.S. states of Texas, California, Washington and Oregon where some of their courses were already in use.

During April 2007, preparation of a summer alignment project for the new courses began at the K-16 Education Center. Under the supervision of a LUCHA alignment coordinator, a group of teachers with Texas Certification and former Mexican

teachers who knew the Mexican educational system well and were now either teaching or tutoring in Texas high school were hired to do this job. Among the things that needed to be identified in the alignment summary of the courses were: TEKS addressed in every chapter, theme, and activity, gaps in coverage, additional Mexican content not found in the TEKS and a list of course vocabulary in both languages (English and Spanish.) The goal was to analyze each Mexican course to the most specific level described in the TAKS, the student's skills and behaviors, provide teachers with a glossary of words the students needed to know in both languages to make the transition into English, and to let the teacher know what the course was lacking, so that the teachers at school could complement the LUCHA courses with the necessary activities and content to bring the course to a 100% alignment to the TEKS. So it was done.

Implementation Design and the LUCHA Courses

LUCHA is a customized tool to help ELL Spanish speaking students succeed. Specifics of the implementation design of the LUCHA program in schools is left to the discretion of the school districts and principals. "It is entirely up to them to schedule the students to work on the LUCHA courses, as well as how the program will function in the school," says the LUCHA Assistant Director. For this reason there is a wide variety of implementation models in place for the LUCHA program. Sometimes the program is controlled by the District Bilingual Director, and sometimes it is left to a teacher in a school. Sometimes schools have laptops with internet for students to check out from the library to advance in their courses at home, and sometimes the LUCHA students can only work before or after school hours in a lab at school. Sometimes a teacher has a LUCHA

course on the screen and all students work at the same pace with the group, and sometimes and individual student is enrolled in a LUCHA course, passes the course and gets the credit for that LUCHA course to be enrolled in another LUCHA course he/she works independently.

The following two LUCHA class scenarios are presented during the training session to the school districts to handle the LUCHA courses. Schools might use one of these models or design their own. They use the program and the courses in the manner they think is more convenient for them (K-16 Ed. Center, 2009).

Computer Lab for LUCHA students (The teacher providing individual support)	Computer Lab for LUCHA students (The teacher leading the group)
- Each student uses a computer in class. - Students take online course in Spanish and are supervised by a certified teacher. - The teacher uses ESL methodologies and/or ASKME courses to help student transition into English.	- The teacher uses the LUCHA course and shows it on a screen. - Each student uses a computer - Students take online course in Spanish and are supervised by a certified teacher. - The teacher uses ESL methodologies and/or ASKME courses to help student transition into English.

Some school districts choose to enroll the students in their regular classes and have them go to a LUCHA lab when they are assigned the same class in English. Others have in the student schedule a class called LUCHA, and the students go to the LUCHA lab to work independently in the LUCHA courses they have been enrolled.

The Challenge of Working with What is Available

The *Colegio de Bachilleres* (Bachilleres) courses lack a high level of instructional and curricular design. They do not have the quality the LUCHA team strives for.They

were created to fulfill a need in Mexico, that of providing online high school education to far away communities and provide an alternative to recuperate credits for dropout students and for students whose working schedule kept them from attending a regular high school. In Mexico, the Bachilleres courses seem to function fine. For the U.S. market although their faults were apparent, they were the only alternative available to Dr. Alanis. Although there has been some improvement in the service Bachilleres provides to UT, their courses continue to have a rather old and conservative design. More importantly perhaps, the subject concepts are there and the content is covered.

In referring to the Bachilleres courses, a LUCHA trainer said, "They are basically textbooks online." They have chapters, activities, quizzes, tests, glossaries, a resource section, and have internet capabilities with a chat/ email/ and a forum section. Students advance in these courses in sequential manner and have tests at the end of each chapter. It is true that even though the courses are provided in a media environment, they are engaging to the students. The language of instruction makes all the difference. The fact that the courses are in Spanish and students understand the content and the instructions of the activities is key to student's success. "*Me explica muy bien todo de una manera fácil de entender para mi,"* (It explains everything in a way I easily understand) says a LUCHA student. "If we didn't have these courses, I don't know how I would make it because here, they don't explain much to you and they expect you to know what you have to do," says another LUCHA student.

No *Colegio de Bachilleres* course passed the TAKS alignment test with 100% in any of the alignment projects, but still "the Mexican courses are very rigorous and

difficult," said a LUCHA school coordinator in a South Texas school district. A Mexican schooled Spanish Coordinator at a South Texas high school stated:

> I am the Spanish coordinator in this high school and the LUCHA program was the responsibility of the ESL teacher. She felt incompetent to lead the program because even though she speaks Spanish, she could not understand the courses. They have an elevated Spanish that not everyone can handle. (Interview, May, 2008)

There is wide agreement among students and teachers regarding this statement. School and district staff in charge of the LUCHA program implementation agrees that the LUCHA program works best when there are Mexican schooled tutors helping the LUCHA students. "I looked for teachers from across (the border) to help. *Ellos están muy bien preparados y ayudan muy bien a los estudiantes* (They are very well prepared and help the students very well,)" says a Bilingual Director in a school district.

The elevated academic Spanish required in the courses makes it difficult for students who have been in the U.S. system for several years. These courses might not be suitable for them. LUCHA services at the moment are designed to help the new immigrant students from Mexico and not Mexican origin students of second or third generation. The courses are difficult even for Mexican immigrant students that have lost the academic Spanish schools in Mexico reinforce.

El Colegio de Bachilleres is well aware of the gaps between their courses and the TEKS. Since, most of the Mexican courses were faulty in activities to develop skills in applied knowledge they opted to create new courses instead of fixing the existing ones. "We knew the Bachilleres courses did not meet the Texas standards, but we observed that teachers were filling the gap," said Alanis. Teachers were fixing what was missing in the

courses complementing them with activities to develop the knowledge and skills from the TEKS that the courses did not have. It is at this point that *El Colegio de Bachilleres* decided to create online courses for the high school immigrant students in the U.S. These courses were referred to as binational courses.

Accountability and the LUCHA Students in Courses

A student is considered a LUCHA student when any of the four different LUCHA services has been requested from the school to help him/her academically. It can be that the student has taken a diagnostic placement exams, his/her transcripts have been obtained from Mexico to complete the student's records on file, a transcript analysis has been performed to award the student credits for the high school courses the student took in Mexico, or that the student is taking LUCHA courses to advance or recuperate lost credits, or improve the class grades. A LUCHA student is a LUCHA student in any of the four situations mentioned.

For a student to enroll in LUCHA courses, a request for courses has to be received at UT LUCHA. Usually it is an ESL teacher, a bilingual coordinator, or a counselor that refers the student to the LUCHA services including the courses. Once the request arrives in LUCHA, the student is enrolled in the courses and a username and password is provided to the student. All new LUCHA students are enrolled in an introductory course from the program of *El Colegio de Bachilleres* online high school. Once the students have taken this introductory course, they start with the LUCHA courses online. The student does not pay for these courses nor does he/she pay for any of the LUCHA services. It is the school or the district the one responsible to pay for the services. Usually,

courses as well as the other LUCHA services are paid through grants from Title I, Title II or Title III provided from the federal or the state governments. These grants aim to better the education of low income students, and students with disadvantages. LUCHA courses cost at the moment $90 dollars, and after passing the LUCHA course for credit, usually 0.5 credits are awarded per course. If we consider that schools budget per student credit is $1,100.00 in Texas, thus the LUCHA courses provide the school districts with a great return for their investment.

Schools that receive federal money must comply with the regulations of the No Child Left Behind Act. Schools are held accountable for the academic performance of their students through several strict measures. Some of these measures include the rate at which student groups are passing the TAKS tests, the percentage of students that drop out of the school system, and attendance among others. Student taking LUCHA courses in schools and who have been benefited from any of the LUCHA services usually improve their attendance record. I noted the increased enthusiasm and commitment to learning I saw in some of the LUCHA students. “It is just natural to be engaged in school when there is a challenge and you see improvement when the challenge is met,” (Field Notes. May 2008). School personnel also saw coursework that LUCHA offered as one educational element that helped students remain engaged during a difficult, transitional time. In referring to the LUCHA courses and the students involvement in them, the Bilingual director at Ryan ISD said, “When students are enrolled in courses that are engaging, they are busy studying, they stay in school and don’t dropout” (Interview, May 2008).

Diagnostic Exams

While explaining the program to a visitor, Dr. Alanis said, "We want to break the stereotype that all students that come from Mexico are at a lower grade level." He was making reference to the formerly mentioned fact that when a student arrives at a high school in the United States and does not speak English, he/she is usually placed by default in 9th grade, New immigrant students are assigned English and elective classes that will help them acquire the language, but unfortunately, they are seldom enrolled in core courses at their grade level. They are therefore unable to continue to the next appropriate science and math classes which would be their true academic placement. They are instead assigned to lower level math and science courses that many times they already took in Mexico, the idea being that they will learn the academic vocabulary and develop English proficiency. In part due to this practice, after a year or two, these once new arrivals forget what they knew of the core courses they had fresh in Spanish in Mexico and find it difficult to relearn material, which in a culturally inaccurate portrayal is often characterized as 'catching up.' This situation becomes even more pressured since these subjects are included in the feared TAKS tests.

A way to help insure proper grade placement of recently arrived Mexican immigrant high school students is through diagnostic tests. LUCHA offers two kinds of diagnostic tests: High school readiness and Algebra readiness. Both tests were made in Mexico and measure academic knowledge from the Mexican school system. "Measuring the students' knowledge in their language and the curricula they were schooled with is fair to the students," comments a LUCHA trainer. "It is as if a person is measured

according to the rules of the game he knows how to play," she adds. The first diagnostic test determines if the student is ready to start *preparatoria*. The test serves as a hard record to prove student's knowledge when nothing else has been used to prove it. It is used primarily for students who enroll in high school and do not bring any academic record of previous studies. It is also used with students that had interrupted schooling. When a student who has not attended school on a continuous basis enrolls in high school and is of high school age, schools use these diagnostic tests to check if the student has a chance to succeed in a LUCHA course. The fact that a student comes from Mexico and is a Spanish speaker does not guarantee that the student can handle a LUCHA course because the courses are demanding and contain academic Spanish, which requires academic preparation to understand.

There were two diagnostic tests during the data collection timeframe. One of them, the High School Readiness diagnostic tests four subjects, and the other one tests only Math and is called Algebra Readiness. The results of the High School Readiness diagnostic test are provided immediately on the screen after the student finished answering the 40 items in the test. Twenty items are questions about Math, 10 about Biology, and 10 cover Geography. The results provide a grade and a percentage of the total grade per subject tested. LUCHA has to note to schools deciding to administer this test that Geography in Mexico focuses on the teaching of Earth Science, whereas in the U.S. it focuses on the teaching of Social Science. This is just one more cultural difference to deal with when we work binationaly with different education systems.

The diagnostic test Algebra Readiness determines if the student is ready to take Algebra 1. It basically allows students to test out of Pre-Algebra. This test is not as popular as the High School Readiness test because it only provides information about one subject area.

The LUCHA program is looking for more alternatives of diagnostic tests. An expanded repertoire would make this service more attractive to schools. After three years of operation, LUCHA proctored 323 diagnostic tests. Although one of the diagnostic tests LUCHA offers, it is not in high demand. Without further research, it is not possible to give a definitive answer for this service's under-use. It is clear that at the present time, other LUCHA services, like transcript analysis and the LUCHA courses offer more gain to students and administrators.

Chapter 5: *LUCHA in Practice*

Introduction

The LUCHA program has been instituted in 23 districts in Texas. This investigation looks at what happened in four of these districts, all of which are located in South Texas and which share many demographic markers as well. Not only districts as a whole, but schools within those districts as well as individuals within those schools are examined. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the successes and challenges that resulted in LUCHA's implementation in these locations with the hope that useful information will be revealed that will improve the lives of the ELL students for which the program has been designed. With this analysis, I intend to answer my second research question, What can be learned from the implementation and practice of the LUCHA program in school districts with almost identical homogeneous populations, and different levels of success with the program?

The theoretical framework employed in this dissertation —theories of social and cultural capital and theory of caring— forms the basis for the analysis of the data. It is noted, however, that Nel Noddings' theory of caring in particular has been a very significant determinant to explain the different levels of success of the LUCHA program in school districts with almost identical student population.

Almost Identical and Homogenous Populations

To study the student population of the school districts included in this dissertation, we start by setting the stage.

This dissertation focuses its analysis on four school districts located in two neighboring Texas counties –Hidalgo and Cameron Counties. They are found in the southernmost area of the U.S. known as the Lower Rio Grande Valley. These two counties border the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, and have a river as the dividing border between the two countries known in Mexico as Río Bravo and in the U.S. as the Rio Grande.

Both counties where the four school districts are located have similar demographics. (See table). According to the census of 2000, both Hidalgo and Cameron County have over 45% households with children. Both have similar population density and a low per capita income. Over 43% children live below the poverty line. Furthermore, the county's per-capita income makes Hidalgo County one of the poorest counties in the U.S.

	Pop. Density per square mile	Households with children	Under age 18	Per-capita income	Under age 18 below poverty line
Hidalgo	363	49.70%	35.30%	$9,899	45.50%
Cameron	370	45.80%	33.80%	$10,960	43.10%

Table 2. Census data on the Texas counties of Hidalgo and Cameron

The population is predominantly Hispanic. In Hidalgo, 88.35% compares to 84.34% in Cameron County.

Data from the Division of Performance Reporting of the Texas Education Agency reports that during the academic year of 2007-2008 there were 1,200 school districts and charters with 8,000 school campuses in the state. The school system serves 4.6 million

students who are primarily Hispanic (47%) and White (35%) (TEA-Division of Performance Reporting, 2007-08).

While not all the four independent school districts (ISDs) in this study are the same size, they have almost identical and homogeneous student populations. Moreover, they have other similar characteristics that will be discussed further in this chapter. For confidentiality purposes, the ISD names have been changed in this study. Their pseudonyms are Valley ISD, Corona ISD, Ryan ISD, and Palma ISD. The first three ISDs started with the LUCHA program since the pilot stage in the academic year of 2006-2007 are located in Hidalgo County. The last one, Palma ISD, started with some LUCHA services in the spring of 2007-2008, and it is located in Cameron County.

	% Hispanic students	% Economically Disadvantaged	% LEP	TAKS % Hispanic students passing-all grades	Longitudinal Dropout Rate Grades 9-12 (Class 2007)
Corona ISD	100	95.6	40	50	11.1
Valley ISD	99	89.3	42	61	13.6
Ryan ISD	99	95.9	55	56	15.3
Palma ISD	98	94.5	42	68	17.9
Texas State	47.2	55.3	16.7	65	16.4

Table 3. TEA student population data from the four districts studied compared to the whole state

The four districts studied have close to a 100% Hispanic student population, which compared to the Texas state percent of 47.2 Hispanic population allows us to infer that most of the Hispanic students in the state are concentrated in school districts at the U.S. border with Mexico. The same can be said for the identifiers "Economically Disadvantaged" and "Limited English Proficient", since the state average is nearly half

the percent of students in these categories in the four school districts studied (TEA-Division of Performance Reporting, 2007-08, 2008).

Although the dropout rate of the Class 2007 for the state of Texas and the school districts studied in this dissertation ranks between 11.1 and 17.9, analyzing the number of students enrolled in each high school grade during the academic year of 2007-2008, regardless of the student count that moved from the public school system for various reasons (see definition of dropout in Chapter 1), it provides an alarming picture for the Hispanic group. (See Table below on Hispanic student in Texas high schools) Considering that the number of students enrolled in 9th grade would ideally continue to be enrolled in school until graduation, a snapshot of the enrollment for that year shows that the difference in Hispanic students enrolled in 12th grade compared to 9th grade is 77,603, which is 41% less students.

Hispanic Students in Texas High School 2007-2008

Grade (Mexican grade equivalent)	Student Count	Hispanic Student Count	Student Count Drop per year Compared to 9th Grade Student Count	% of Student Count drop per year compared to 9th Grade Student Count
9th (3o. Sec).	**397,085**	**185,008**		
10th (1o. Prepa.)	332,017	142,059	42,949	23.21%
11th (2o. Prepa.)	294,422	118,742	66,266	35.82%
12th (3o. Prepa)	273,606	107,405	**77,603**	**41.95%**

Table 4. Hispanic high school students in Texas 2007-2008.
Retrieved from: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/adhocrpt/Standard_Reports.html

From the total number of Hispanic student enrolled in 12th grade (107,405), only 94,571 became graduating students in the Class of 2007 leaving 21,654 students behind. Something to note is that a great majority of Hispanic students who graduated from high school in 2007-2008 were in the Recommended Program, which is not College bound

and only required 22 academic credits. In May 2008, a law was passed to raise the bar in this program. The graduation requirements for Texas students beginning with the freshman class of 2007-2008 that pursue the Recommended High School Program or the Distinguished Achievement Program must earn 26 course credits to graduate, including four credits each in math, science, social studies, and English language arts (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

These new requirements will have an impact on the number of Hispanic students graduating from Texas high schools. If 70.85% of Hispanic students were graduating from high school in the Recommended Program with 22 course credits and no variables are changed, it is foreseeable that raising the bar to 26 credits will yield a lower percentage of Hispanic students graduating in the immediate following years and disappearing from the dropout official statistics (Valenzuela et al., 2006). (See table of Graduating Students)

2007-2008 Graduates by Graduation Plan Statewide
Totals of Major Ethnic Groups

	Hispanic count	White count
DISTINGUISHED PGM (26 Credits)	**9,727**	**15,597**
MINIMUM/IEP PGM (26 Credits)	**16,884**	20,502
RECOMMENDED PGM (22 Credits)	**67,960**	**76,884**
	94,571	112,983

Table 5. Number of graduating students of the two major ethnic groups in Texas 2007-2008.

Retrieved from:http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/grad/2008-09_GradBro_SP.pdf

The issue of the number of Hispanic students that do not finish high school successfully in the U.S. is even more aggravated by the number of Hispanic students

enrolled in 12th grade that do not graduate with their cohort. The following table shows the comparison of the two major ethnic groups enrolled in 2007-2008 in Texas. The Hispanic count of senior high school students that did not graduate with their cohort is four times higher than the White count. Considering that the Hispanic student population is the highest of all ethnic groups in the state, and the one with the highest student count that does not complete high school successfully, poses a problem.

2007-2008 Outcome of Students Enrolled in 12th Grade
Statewide Totals of Major Ethnic Groups

	Hispanic count	White count
Students enrolled in 12th grade.	107,405	116,225
Students who graduated in that year	94,571	112,983
Students who did not graduate	12,834	3,242

Table 6. 2007-2008 Outcome of Students Enrolled in 12th Grade

Other school district indicators are similar among the school districts in this research. They include the school districts' staff, the teachers, the total revenue and the operating expenditures per pupil.

Before the First Student Arrives

Much in the way that a baby's life is affected by the mother's situation and actions before its birth and a restaurant's menu and food presentation may determine the establishment's chance for success before the first customer walks through the door, so it is with educational programs. The findings in my research show this to be the case with LUCHA. While to some the demographics of the four districts might suggest a uniformity that would be translated into similar attitudes and perspective across the board, this proved not to be the case. The same LUCHA program was offered in all the four

districts in the study but its acceptance and practice varied district-by-district and in some instances school-by-school within the same district. Many of the differences can be attributed to what transpired before the first student entered the program. I noted in my Researcher's Journal of May, 2008,

> I came to realize that even though LUCHA is the same program everywhere and offers the same services, the way the LUCHA program is conceptualized in each school and district determines the different route they take in the program implementation.

Additionally, Darling-Hammond (1990) recognizes the importance of "transformation of policy into teacher actions from the vantage point of the teachers themselves," (p. 341) which will be shown to account in some measure for a variety of LUCHA outcomes.

As will be discussed at some length in another section of the chapter, Palma ISD conceptualized the program with a district-wide commitment to high standards and student centered service.

In Ryan ISD, LUCHA is given a high priority. This district has a unique implementation model which not only incorporates all of the LUCHA services but in addition takes advantage of other services for distance education offered by the UT Austin K-16 Education Center. Ms Pereira, the Bilingual District Director pioneered a very complete and successful LUCHA program. As did Valley and Corona ISDs, she started with the program at Ryan during the academic year of 2006-2007. Ms Pereira is convinced that concepts learned and information from one language transfers into another language and that it is important that students continue to acquire knowledge and learn in their first language as they acquire their second (Cummins, 2007a, 2007b). From this

theoretical vantage point, she developed her own student academic transfer knowledge strategy using the different options the K-16 Education Center offers for at-risk students. She goes beyond the LUCHA services themselves to provide her immigrant students with all the resources she can find to help them learn English, learn course content, and pass the TAKS tests.

She has total ownership of the LUCHA program. Convinced that with support, her students can succeed academically, she devised a program with teachers and tutors that could relate to her immigrant students. She hired Mexican teachers and retired Mexican teachers to tutor the students and explained why it worked out so well for everyone concerned:

> *Y la mayoría de estas personas tienen mucha experiencia en el área de la educación. Unos están jubilados después de 20 años en México y viven aquí. Les damos un sueldo respetable por su certificado, y ellos cuidan su trabajo y miran que (a) los niños (inmigrantes) muchas veces los ponen a un lado (en las escuelas norteamericanas) y ellos no. Los niños del programa de nosotros son los que vienen primero, y ellos quieren educarlos bien. Si se están quedando atrás, ellos les ayudan para que salgan adelante. Tienen muy buen contacto con los padres. Desde que ellos (los maestros de México) llegaron a este departamento las calificaciones del distrito han subido bastante. Sí han subido las calificaciones del bilingual child, se han mejorado porque el maestro se identifica con el alumno y el alumno se identifica con el maestro.*(Interview, May 2008)
>
> And most of them are very experienced in the field of education. Some of them retired after having worked in Mexico for twenty years and now they live here. We give them a good salary because they are certified teachers, and they are very conscientious in their work. And, they see that the immigrant children are often pushed to one side (in the U.S. schools) and they don't do that. The children in our program have first priority and they (these teachers) want to educate them well. If the children are falling behind, the teachers help them so that they continue to progress. These teachers are in good touch with parents. Since these teachers have arrived (from Mexico) in this department, the grades in the district have gone up a

> lot. If the grades of the bilingual child have gone up, they have improved because the teacher identifies with the student and the student identifies with the teacher.
>
> As I noted in my Researcher's Journal (May, 2008)
>
> It calls to my attention that Ms Pereira is a Mexican American middle aged woman who is leading all these Mexican teachers and does not feel, even a bit, intimidated by their mastery of Spanish. As a Mexican national myself, I have sensed sometimes rejection from Mexican Americans who grew up rejecting their mother tongue because of social pressures. I observed how Ms Pereira makes a conscious effort to improve her Spanish. She cares about learning back cultural capital that was subtracted from her during her school years. When I asked her if she would feel fine if we changed to English during the interview, she said, "*A mí me gusta practicar el español porque quiero aprender más. En esta viejez, pero apenas empecé a valorizar mi primer idioma*." (I like to practice Spanish because I want to learn more. In this old age, but I just started to give value to my first language.) She values what the Mexican immigrants bring along with them and values education in Spanish they received in Mexico. This speaks to the students as a person that cares for them and does not reject them as unwanted Mexican immigrants in the school. In a caring environment, high school students feel accepted. They give more of themselves to succeed in school.

Ms Pereira's natural and genuine caring is reflected in her behavior towards her teachers and students. She makes it clear that she understands the subtractive nature of much of the treatment and education these students experience, and her response is to bring individuals who combat that subtractive schooling (Valenzuela 1999) with a caring, supportive, educational way of being and teaching, and a positive exchange of cultural capital.

She considers it her responsibility to make sure every student has their foreign transcripts analyzed, so that credit for prior studies is counted towards high school graduation requirements. She has the LUCHA students starting with the *preparatoria* courses in Spanish offered online through the LUCHA services and then she transfers the

students to ASKME online courses in English offered through the UT high school program at the K-16 Education Center. Her students have several hours a day to work in online courses in a lab arranged only for LUCHA students with bilingual tutors available all the time.

Additionally, her LUCHA students do not only benefit from LUCHA services but from the other three programs offered by the same UT Center. Students use resources from the UT Migrant Program (UT Austin, 2009b) the UT High School ASKME courses (UT Austin, 2009a), and the Credit By Exam (CBE) option. She explains, "Initially we have our children taking LUCHA courses in Spanish but if you go back and you look at the kids that took courses in Spanish last year they have transferred into English, into either ASKME courses in English this year or the CD courses through UT Austin in English.

This comprehensive approach to push recent immigrant high school students through high school providing resources and guidance helps immigrant integration to the U.S. school system and to society.

"Así Es"

After observing and interviewing students and teachers, and interviewing the Bilingual Executive Director and the District superintendent I held a conversation with Mr. Infante, the Ryan ISD LUCHA Coordinator. Although he proved to be a man of few words, he acknowledged two of the most critical and, at present, discretionary factors in LUCHA's implementation in schools –whether students are permitted to include LUCHA

classes in their class schedule and whether they are permitted to take one class immediately upon completion of another.

In contrast, some districts do not allow LUCHA classes to be included on a student's regular class schedule. Some schools have LUCHA time during the ESL class period and other schools only offer LUCHA classes before or after school. Still other schools see LUCHA courses as antithetical to student progress while other schools seem unable to offer a wide variety of courses because they do not feel they have adequate academic coverage and have not figured out ways to provide it.

Although Mr. Infante's responses may seem almost minimalistic, they quietly acknowledge one of the best and most successful academic visions that LUCHA helped to create in the entire Valley and as he says, "That's that" (*Así es*).

B: *Yo quisiera ver un Report Card de ustedes en donde vengan los cursos de LUCHA de los estudiantes. O sea, ¿los estudiante de ustedes tienen en su 'schedule' (por ejemplo) LUCHA Biología, LUCHA etc?* (I would like to see a report card from your school where the LUCHA courses are mentioned. That is, your student has in his schedule, for example, LUCHA *Biología*, LUCHA etc.?)
JI: *Exactamente*. (Exactly.)
B: *Y si el estudiante termina con su clase de LUCHA Biología, le pueden dar (otra como) LUCHA Economía, ¿verdad?* (And, if the student finishes with his LUCHA *Biología* class, can you give him another one like LUCHA *Economía*. Right?)
JI: *Así es y esto sale en su 'schedule'*. (That's right and all that is in their schedule.)
B: En otras escuelas, no. ¡Esa es la diferencia! la forma de… (JP: implementarlo.) Sí, pero es la forma de cómo categorizan el programa de LUCHA en la escuela. Pero, eso es decisión de cada escuela. (That doesn't happen in other schools. That's the difference! The way of… (JP: implementing it.) Yes, but it (really) is the way (schools) categorize the LUCHA program in the school. But, that's a decision of every school.)
JI: *Así es*. (That's right.)
(Interview, May, 2008)

LUCHA Students' Social Capital on the Rise

At Ryan ISD, Ms Pereira obtained funds to equip laptops with internet cards for the LUCHA students. Students check out their laptops before the school day is over and pick them up in the library. They walk proudly with their laptops at their shoulders (Interview, May 2008). There are still many families in this population that do not have internet access at home, or even a computer, so this is not only an educational aid, but a visible reward for students' dedication to their studies. This concrete gesture of trust and accomplishment also helps students close the learning gap they often face.

Ms Pereira also had a LUCHA summer camp for her students after the first semester LUCHA was implemented in her district. She would allow students to come and work at her office when there was no classroom assigned for the LUCHA students. "Last summer we had LUCHA during the summer and part of it was a mistake on our part in the implementation," she said. Students did not finish their courses during the semester and needed extra time. A timeline was not set up for the children and they needed to complete assessments during the summer, so they came into a classroom and had summer school there. The following year, tutors set a timeline for students taking courses. Still, Ms Pereira said, "Unless there is a really special need for a child of course our office will be available for them to come in but that shouldn't be the cases here. But if the need is there, of course, they do come first."

The selection of teachers and other personnel to work with LUCHA students reflects the conceptualization of, among other things, the place the students themselves will occupy in the program paradigm, and to what extent the teachers will be able to help

the students navigate the complex matrix of education in the United State that is particularly confounding to ELLs. Suffice it to say that the decision of Ms Pereiera in Ryan, could have been replicated throughout the Valley.

The students who work with the Ryan teachers will have an enriched educational experience and be working with people who not only know they are capable of doing well in school, but are dedicated to do everything in their power to make sure that happens. This is something that is known before a single student enters a classroom. These teachers study the courses they are teaching, and they are constantly monitoring any change in the courses. They plan activities around the course to engage their students in learning, and to prepare the students to transfer their content knowledge in Spanish to English. They solve problems that arise with the online courses. First, they try to solve them in house; then, they seek support from the area UT promoter, or contact UT directly. They count on a peer support group of teachers to discuss and exchange ideas to improve their teaching with the LUCHA courses. Students get more instructional support in Ryan ISD than in any other school district that started with LUCHA at the same time.

Other Conceptualizations, Other Outcomes

In Corona ISD, the person who had direct contact with the LUCHA students was not a teacher. Ms Montaño was an undergrad student who had to halt her studies to work and make money to finance her education. On the positive side, she was able to establish good rapport with students who were almost her age, and her recollection of her own high school courses helped her tutor the students. On the other hand, she lacked the teaching experience of years in the field and could not provide the students with instructional

support on her own. The ESL teacher in charge of the LUCHA program there could not provide instructional support both because she lacked the knowledge to teach the LUCHA courses, and was not proficient in academic Spanish. The decisions that put these two sincere and kind individuals, who lacked the academic skills to help students do their best, put the students at a disadvantage through no fault of their own. The district did not consider the program a high priority, and did not commit resources across the district to make it successful.

In Valley ISD, only one teacher agreed to teach a LUCHA course in Spanish in one of the high schools, Mr. Domínguez. In the other schools, no ESL teacher wanted to work with these students and two teachers of Spanish took over. In one of those schools, it was Ms Vidaurri, the Spanish teacher and Department Coordinator who had a successful program. In the other high school, the outcome of the LUCHA program was not good and the requests for LUCHA services have been steadily declining. Ms Vidaurri and Mr. Domínguez are discussed at length later in this chapter.

If the district had considered this program one of higher importance and value, teachers would have been more enthusiastic and eager to participate, as their own social capital would have risen. It appears that the success of potential LUCHA students in this district is at-risk before they arrive on the scene, since at district level there is so little enthusiasm to work with them. So, unfortunately, students who, by all accepted indicators are considered 'at-risk' are essentially put at further risk by the district's apathy.

It is simply ludicrous to say that these districts are not able to find the right people allow the program to thrive. As Mrs. Pereira said:

> … this type of professional is found throughout the U.S. I have been to Washington D.C.; I have been to New York City; I have been to Philadelphia; I have been to New Mexico. And sometimes when I am sitting in restaurants, some of the waiters… I start talking to them, (I ask them) What did you do? They're professionals, they were teachers… And you find these people throughout the U.S. they are out there. So yeah the proximity to the Mexican border is good, I mean, but you find them. I have found them in Houston, and I find that there are a lot of professionals working as caregivers, as dishwashers, they're out there -lots of them (Interview, May 2008)

Accountability and its Impact on LUCHA Students and Programs

The LUCHA program serves ELLs and in particular the recently arrived immigrant high school students, the majority of whom are from Mexico. This vulnerable population evokes a variety of responses among politicians and educators, among others. Additionally, there seems to be a growing and pervasive anti-immigrant sentiment that shows no signs of abating. A poll by Rice University that was taken in Houston indicated that anti-immigrant sentiment has risen by 50% since 2004, and this certainly affects the students, as it is hard to be a scapegoat and a stellar student at the same time (Rahman, 2008).

Many educators endorse the notion of accountability as response to concern about the quality and equity of educational opportunities and the support needed by all students in public schools. Some long-time educators in particular, see progress in the school environment that they attribute to the No Child Left Behind national mandate. Mrs. Pereira, for example, explains that the Act has shined a spotlight on the ELL student population, and in her opinion, this focused attention has made it easier to advocate for

well-educated and qualified teachers who are bilingual themselves as well as meaningful programs for this group of students. (Interview, May 2008)

In its present Texas permutation, accountability standards rely on number crunching and high stakes standardized testing in specific academic areas of specific groupings of students. Part of the accountability arsenal includes an insistence that exit tests, required for high school graduation in Texas be given in English only, regardless of the amount of time an immigrant student has been in the United States or what that student has completed in terms of education in his/her home country. It should be noted that any high school student who has not passed the exit exams is not permitted to graduate from high school, even when that student has successfully completed all of the required high school curricula to do so. There have been instances when students have been accepted by colleges to attend the next semester, but were not permitted to graduate because of a failed exit test. These facts, along with other requirements, have created consequences that some argue are antithetical to the most supportive and productive relationship between student and teacher, and the most equitable paradigm.

Teachers' reactions to this stress also take different forms and elicit different responses. As this section will illustrate, some teachers are dedicated to students' progress in spite of an unfair and punitive system. Others see the student's placement as being either in a neutral spot where they can't 'hurt the statistics,' and that the teacher and counselor's primary role is to maintain the student in that position, whether or not it reflects the student's true progress and while there, everything should be done to prepare the student to pass the required tests in English. This means in practice, that a school

might not see the advantage, or in more blunt terms might see a statistical disadvantage in allowing a student to advance to the 11th grade based on credits earned in Mexico because then he/she will be subject to high stakes exit testing in English that would not be an issue if the student remained in the 10th grade. Inherent in this view is the acknowledgement that the school is to some extent failing to provide services to help the student maintain a steady academic pace, and also be in classes and programs that would enhance his/her English proficiency.

AYP

Two of the significant markers for the school and those who judge it are the AYP statistics and the scores on the high-stakes test where applicable, such as in Texas the TAKS tests. In Texas, those students in the 11th grade who fail to pass the tests are not permitted to graduate. The passing and failure rates of the TAKS are one of the statistics which are used to compile the AYP rates.

Annual Yearly Progress, AYP, refers to the federally mandated accountability system required by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (EESA.) AYP reports three indicators for each district and campus in the state –Reading/English Language Arts (Reading/ELA), Mathematics, and an Other Measure. Reports are made for each student group, i.e. African American, Hispanic, White, Economically Disadvantaged, Special Education, and Limited English Proficiency. Under NCLB, each state must set a specific score on the tests that indicate whether students at different grade levels are 'proficient' in language arts and math, that is, that the student is on grade level. (www.tea.tx.us.)

This sort of cat and mouse game with counselors hiding students in less 'critical' grades exacts a heavy price from the students (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000). Since many immigrant students are already older than their United States counterparts, this delay, for circumstances totally beyond their control, is a step in the wrong direction. Since they are required to begin to take the exit level TAKS in the 11th grade, some schools look for wiggle room in the system to have these students' counselors consider placing the ones who will probably not pass their TAKS in grades where the tests are not required. That is, the mentality that endorses this would believe that it is better if a student that is not likely to pass the TAKS is enrolled in 9th or in 10th grade. That is the reason why the following student's comments make painful sense, "*yo debería de estar en 11 pero me bajaron a 9 para que no presentara unos exámenes*" (I should be in 11th grade but I was placed in 9th grade, so that I would not take some exams.) (Please note: the district is not cited in this quote, because this practice of student placement, was explained 'off the record' and repeated frequently enough so that the student's comment could have come from any number of schools and districts.)

Although students can make this kind of statement, it does not necessarily mean that they really understand the negative impact this calculated 'holding back' can have on their self- esteem, not to mention the fact that it increases the likelihood that they will not complete high school. This is a group, however, that, with the right encouragement, will seek out LUCHA courses. ELL students, who have been enrolled in a lower grade than their age, mainly because of the language barrier, know that LUCHA courses can help them advance. Ms Vidaurri, of Valley ISD explains, "*Bueno, ellos están ahí porque*

quieren el crédito y para avanzar. Entonces no es para reforzar, es para obtener el crédito. Es lo que a ellos los está motivando a estar ahí." (Well, they are here because they want the credits and to advance. Then, this is not to provide support; it is to obtain the credits.)

Inherent in her statement is the understanding that she will work with the students to help them move forward, regardless of its statistical consequences. It should be noted, that the question of providing English courses which help students attain an adequate proficiency to pass exit tests, is a concern to many educators and is yet to be resolved in a way that deals with all the ins and outs of state requirements. Off the record, educators say that there seems to be no chance at this time to allow exit tests, for example, to be administered and honored in a language other than English, and that it is not a battle they are willing to undertake.

Sometimes the lack of support for the LUCHA program is generated because of the state accountability stress on teachers. They are held accountable for their students' academic performance in standardize mandatory testing from the state of Texas. The feared TAKS tests have changed the pedagogical practices in Texas schools taking away the rewarding teaching and learning experience. Almost all decisions about student placement and curriculum are viewed through the lens of 'how will it affect the test score.' Teachers sometimes oppose having their students taken away from their lessons to pull-out programs like the LUCHA program. Mr. Lazo, a UT based LUCHA program promoter explains,

> …And the idea is that the knowledge itself, the knowledge base is going to transfer… As they start learning and mastering the English language, and

> learning the terminology that it is what they are struggling with, they'll understand it. They have the basis for it. It has the content information. It's like, and I always use this example,: if they drop me off in the middle of China, somewhere, I would have a hard time communicating with them. It doesn't mean that I forgot all my Math, I forgot all my Science, or that I forgot all of that. I just would not know what it means to communicate all of that in China. So the knowledge base is still there; we just need to get that, bridge that gap with the language. It's what we are trying to do. And once we bridge that gap, then the knowledge itself will come straight from that, and to me, that's the basis of LUCHA. I guess it is our basic goal to get through LUCHA ...And that's the hardest concept to get to some of the teachers because their mentality is based on the TAKS test. That's what they are worried about. They're more worried about, is this student going to be able to pass the TAKS test? And, if you talk to enough teachers (you'll find out that it all comes down to) that's what they are worried about. (Interview, May, 2008)

Because teachers are so worried about the accountability rating that they as individuals, their department, their school and their district be assigned, sometimes the student as a person, as an individual and the subject of all school activity loses priority. The TAKS have to be in English and the LUCHA courses do not help them directly to learn the language. Teachers have to transition the students to English filling out the gap between the LUCHA courses designed in Spanish and the English courses Mr. Lazo compares the situation he faces in the different school districts with teachers that resist changing their ways. He said,

> So they'd rather take a chance of the student dropping out and it's sad to say that they really take a chance of the student dropping out coming in with 10 credits (because of LUCHA) and taking them as a freshman and going through to try to make them pass TAKS than trying to make them going through and maybe try to learn the English language, you know (the thing is that) they still have a year to learn the English language, (instead of) giving (them) the credits and place them where they should be placed. And that is probably our biggest battle. Like right now, it is one of my battles at the high school nearby because the teachers that are teaching the English component to get them to… they are more worried about, "I don't have enough time to teach them the English language so that they can pass

> the TAKS." So, in a sense they have 17 and 18 year olds seating in the class as freshman, since, you know, they can stay there (in the school system) until they are 21. (Interview, May, 2008)

There does not seem to be an end in sight for these conflicts and difficulties. In Texas, Senate Bill 1031 passed both houses of the Senate in 2007. The contents of the bill call for the TAKS to be phased out by 2012. Instead, students will take 'end of course' exams in four core subjects. It remains to be seen how this will affect language requirements and graduation rules. In its testimony regarding this bill, the Texas Federation of Teachers (TFT, 2007) stated:

> TFT also supports the proposal to change the exit-level graduation standard to one that more accurately reflects a student's cumulative achievement level, as measured by all the tested core courses in high school – not merely by one standardized test. While this reform eases the rigidity of the exit-level requirement, we believe still more alternative pathways to graduation should be considered, giving more weight to the teacher's evaluation of a student's overall academic performance.

What is clear is that the present system creates an untenable situation for most ELLs, and in particular immigrant youth who arrive in the U.S. as high school students. In a brief discussion of No Child Left Behind, Nel Noddings (2007) recognizes that while some of the mandate's requirements may in fact shine a spotlight on the need for quality and effective education for traditionally underserved groups, it also imposes unfair and unreasonable expectations on others:

> Clearly, there is some justice in demanding now that schools achieve roughly the same results with all students. NCLB requires that test results be disaggregated by race, gender and special educational categories, and that every designated group meet the established standard. At the level of groups, it seems entirely reasonable to expect that the average black child should do as well as the average white child, but it is absurd to demand that special education students and students new to the English language should be held to the same standard. (p. 201)

Ms Vidaurri

Real differences in organization, implementation and administration of LUCHA, as well as its success and effects on the students it serves cannot always be explained in district-wide generalizations. In the following sections, it becomes clear that there was a variety of factors that influenced the program's success. These include organizational variables that include the presence or lack of commitment to the program at the administrative level, the effectiveness of leadership, organizational structure and communication across staff directly in charge of making the program work, and the quality, relevance and consistency of communication with students' parents.

On the other hand, it is observable that there are other factors which pertain to individuals that teach or tutor the LUCHA students. These relate to the LUCHA teachers' skills, attitudes, and values, for example, their academic language proficiency in Spanish, their training in ESL methodologies, their aptitude to teach or tutor across the curriculum, and their personal and pedagogical response to the program and its students. There are also inherently individual factors such as the LUCHA teachers' social and cultural capital and their ethics of care. Through my perspective, the theory of ethics of care is a significant determinant that helps to explain why there can be such a difference in the level of success of the LUCHA program. I examine this reality through a comparison in the levels of success of schools within the same district.

In the case of Valley ISD, two well-intentioned individuals brought different expectations, talents, and responses, to the LUCHA program and the results, while not

entirely to their credit or their fault, reflected their particular visions and the support and lack thereof with which they were greeted or were able to generate. The two individuals are Ms Vidaurri, Spanish Coordinator at Kennedy High School, and Mr. Domínguez, a Math instructor and tutor at Hayward High School.

LUCHA started in the district in the academic year of 2006-2007 when there were not implementation requirements. “We started working with the districts with a grass roots approach,” said Dr. Alanis explaining that they were discovering the different school districts’ needs and adapting to them the best they could. To Ms Davis in UT, this approach meant giving each district the flexibility to use the LUCHA program at their will and according to the special circumstances that would surround the program. Although this flexibility proved beneficial to some districts, it was dreadful to others leaving the program like an orphan child with no one wanting to take care of this project and accepting full responsibility for its development and success or failure. This could happen because of the lack of guidance, and support from the district administration for the program.

When the program started in Kennedy HS, no one was really aware of the specific ways it could benefit the students and what would be required of the school personnel to meet these ends. “I think what happened at the very beginning, the initial state of starting the program was that we were not informed about what the program was really all about,” recalls Ms Smith, a school counselor. The school decided that someone that could communicate in English and in Spanish would be suitable to run the program in the school, and the program was assigned to an ESL teacher. After several weeks, when this

teacher and other ESL teachers tried to understand the LUCHA courses, they realized that the courses contained specific subject content written in an academic Spanish that was beyond their level of proficiency. An ESL teacher was selected to run the program in the high school, but after a few weeks, she decided that she was not the right person for the position. "*Ella no se sentía capaz en el idioma de español de poder ayudarle a los estudiantes porque su vocabulario, pues no era muy extenso.*" (She did not feel her Spanish was strong enough to be able to help the students because of her vocabulary; it was not very extensive), recalled Ms Vidaurri. Ms Vidaurri was the Spanish Department Coordinator at the school, who at the invitation of the ESL teachers, took charge of the program. Not only was she able to communicate in English and in Spanish, but she had the academic Spanish the LUCHA courses required. In recognizing their limits, the ESL teachers made a major contribution to the success of the program in their school.

Ms Vidaurri's leadership, informed by her own cultural capital and funds of knowledge and exemplifying Nodding's theory of caring, helped create a dynamic leadership style that energized the students and benefited the entire the school as a whole as well. Her enthusiasm for the program was a main reason for its success. After doing some research on her own about the program in January 2008, she was told when she found out that it was a way to provide the ELL students with course credits. "*Y esto yo lo vi como una ayuda para ellos (los estudiantes) de tratar de obtener créditos*," (I saw it as a way to help them (the students) to try to obtain credits,) she recalled. It was of utmost importance to her that the program provided a valid accreditation for the students' prior studies in Mexico, since she had gone through the same life experience as a high school

Mexican recent immigrant student coming from the neighboring Mexican border state of Tamaulipas.

Ms Vidaurri was well acquainted with the bureaucratic side of school administration. She recognized the fact that scheduling a new program always seemed to pose a problem. Knowing that the students were more likely to study the LUCHA courses during the school day, at first, Ms Vidaurri wanted to create a LUCHA class, where the LUCHA courses were going to be the focus and each student could work independently in their online courses. The problem she encountered was that she was the Department of Spanish coordinator who teaches the Advanced Program (AP) Spanish classes and the Pre-AP classes in this school of approximately 2,500 students. She taught many Spanish classes and she could not teach LUCHA during the day at the same time. Clearly this was a situation that could have been a disaster due to a lack of resources and a teacher stretched beyond her limits expected to do two jobs, or in this case three jobs – Department coordinator, teacher, and LUCHA teacher/coordinator.

Ms Vidaurri proposed a second option, that of allotting some of the two class periods of the ESL class that amount for 100 minute sessions to the LUCHA courses. She offered to teach the ESL classes and that she would allot some time for LUCHA. This option was not accepted either, until the urgent need arose to advance some 8 or 10 students in specific course credits. The students' counselors sought approval from the school administration to request help through the LUCHA program, even though, these students had passed the two-year period in which they are considered ELLs. The language barrier these students still had made them suitable to be LUCHA students. They

took LUCHA courses in a short period of time using the English class to advance them in the credits they needed before the TAKS tests.

Ms Vidaurri wanted to make a point about the importance of having programs like LUCHA in her school in order to give the ELL students in high school a chance to finish the course requirements and graduate. She mentioned the case of a student who got so motivated to continue in school that this student decided not to drop and registered to take an intensive English summer course at the University of Texas PanAm course to learn the English he needed to finish high school faster. She said that to finish high school, it just makes sense to have the ELL taking courses in his/her language while they learn English to pass the exit TAKS. She stated,

> *Entonces es bien importante para mí en este caso el programa de LUCHA porque quieres terminar, y LUCHA es lo que hace, en tu propio idioma, pues estás estudiando los cursos en tu propio idioma, porque sería imposible, y la verdad que es ilógico que les den una clase de gobierno, que les den una clase de historia en inglés cuando el estudiante no sabe el idioma.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> So in this case, the LUCHA program is very important to me because you want to finish, and that's what LUCHA does, in your own language, so you're studying the courses in your own language, because it would be impossible, and in truth it's illogical that (students) are taught a government class, that students are taught a history class in English when they don't know the language.

The Personal Informs the Professional

It is not uncommon for Mexican families to have relatives born on both sides of the U.S. –Mexico border, as it was Mrs. Vidaurri's case. She came to the U.S. at high school age after finishing *3o. de Secundaria* in Mexico, which is equivalent to 9th grade in the U.S. She received training as an office assistant in Mexico and got a diploma called

Academia. When she moved to the U.S, she was placed back in 8th grade, which was two years behind her grade level. The reason for this placement was that she did not speak English well. Concerned about her immigrant students' morale and relating it to her own lived experience, she explained,

> *Cuando uno llega de México, y a veces, crees allá (cuando estás en México) que ya estás terminando la prepa y llegas y te ponen en clases de un nivel más bajo y en cierta forma es algo que te baja la moral.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> When you come from Mexico, and at times think there (when you are in Mexico) that you have finished *prepa* and you arrive and they put you in classes at a lower grade, in a certain way, that's something that lowers your morale.

Although her United States high school experience was difficult, in some part because she was the eldest student in the class, she did graduate. She went on to university and earned a bachelors degree and a masters in Spanish as well as certification to teach Spanish in the public schools. Since she graduated, she has lived and worked in the same Texas Rio Grande Valley region where her family lives.

Her high school life experience resembles that of her students, which enables her to recognize their shared cultural capital and funds of knowledge and use her influence and caring to try to mitigate the subtractive perception (Valenzuela 1999) that many have towards these adolescent immigrant students. Her academic training and expertise, have assured that Ms Vidaurri knows well the Mexican and the American school system and is bicultural and bilingual, which makes it easy for her to navigate in both cultures.

She sees life as a challenge, and this new program represented a new challenge. "*Es parte de mi personalidad*," (It's part of my personality), she says.

The idea to have the opportunity to help provide course credits to the students in her school for prior studies done outside of the U.S., and specifically from Mexico, besides the LUCHA course offerings in Spanish were very attractive to Ms Vidaurri. Explaining in her first language which continues to be the language she is more comfortable with, she said,

> *… y que no sea en vano la educación que tuviste en México, sino que vamos a tratar de darte créditos y que sigas adelante, que con el programa puedas tomar cursos en tu idioma, en español y poder avanzar*. (Interview. May, 2008)
>
> And so that the education you had in Mexico will not have been in vain, so we're going to try to give you credits, so you can continue to progress, with the program you can take classes in your language, Spanish, and be able to advance.

She saw the LUCHA program as a way to help the students make up for the lost academic credits when they moved to a U.S. high school, and a way to gain the course credits they needed to graduate on time.

It is obvious that her combination of knowledge, caring and skills are embraced by the students, and work to their benefit. She notes that a lot of her students come to her when they are close to dropping out of school. It is because of the LUCHA program and what they see as a real help to advance in their high school path that they decide not to drop out. The fact that these immigrant students are usually older than their peers in class, and that they foresee that they will not be able to obtain the credits they need to graduate or the possibility to be enrolled in core courses to advance in their requirements to graduate is quite discouraging to the students as it was to Ms Vidaurri. She says that one of the reasons she loves this program is seeing her students' joy when they receive credits

for their work in the LUCHA courses and for their prior studies in Mexico. She proudly talked about how students that were going to drop out of school became highly motivated to continue studying with the help of the program.

> *Algunos de ellos ya estaban en una actitud negativa porque ya tenían una edad mayor que los estudiantes de aquí normalmente y su meta, sus planes eran ya salirse de aquí de la high school sin terminar, y los he visto como después de que obtienen sus créditos y después de que toman las clases por medio del programa y que ven que lo obtienen y dicen, "pero ¿de veras me lo van a dar el crédito?, ¿de veras me lo van a dar?" pues aquí dice aprobado, y si aprobaste, entonces te tienen que dar el crédito. Entonces en algunas ocasiones yo misma los he llevado a la oficina de registro para que ellos puedan ver que si es cierto que les van a dar su crédito, ¿no? Y es algo que los motiva, los motiva a seguir.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> Some of them already had a negative attitude because they were already older than the students usually are here and they had their goal, their plan was to get out of here, of high school, without completing it, and I've seen them later, after they've earned their credits, after they've taken their classes through the program, and they see what they've accomplished, and they say, "but, are they really going to give me my credit? Is it true that they're going to give it to me?" Well, here it says you passed, and if you passed, then they have to give you credit. And, on some occasions, I myself have taken them to the registrar's office so that they can see for themselves that yes, it's true, that they are going to give them credit, right? And it's something that motivates them, it motivates them to continue.

Through her understanding of what it takes for these students to succeed, Ms Vidaurri also acknowledges what she knows that these students know. Gertrude Winston in Ladson-Billings (1994) expresses respect and concern for the academic progress of African American students that also rings true for the immigrant students of LUCHA:

> I don't think anybody ever truly measures what the children know…They never give a test that measures the children's ability to think through difficult problems, or to come up with a variety of solutions. Some of our children have a lot of wisdom. They've seen a lot of things, been through a lot. You have to be smart to weather the kinds of storms some of these

> children have been through but you know they're not going to make a test that measures that kind of stuff. (pp. 72-72)

She cares about her students enough as to take the time and effort to provide them with convincing proof that their work is going to be rewarded. She makes sure that each of her students feels motivated to work in the program even though students have to work before and after school to complete the LUCHA courses. A student who was part of a group discussion about LUCHA commented: "We can work on the LUCHA courses at school from 7:30am that the bus arrives to school to 8:00am when the classes start. In the afternoon, students can work from 4:00pm to the time the bus leaves the school, which is usually between 4:30 and 5:00pm." Although students could work longer in school, the fact that the LUCHA students in that school do not have private transportation causes Ms Vidaurri to close the language lab when the school bus leaves in the afternoon.

Ms Vidaurri has asked other teachers to support her LUCHA students allowing them to continue working on the LUCHA courses when they finish their class activities and there is a computer with internet in the classroom. Students report that although this is true, they seldom have time to finish their class activities to work on the LUCHA courses outside of Ms Vidaurri's LUCHA times. Theoretically, students could access the LUCHA courses with an internet connection from any place, but rarely do these students have internet at home.

Rene, a student with internet privileges at home, is taking an extra academic load to finish high school this year. He was a senior in Mexico when he came to the U.S. Because of his lack of knowledge of the English language, he was placed in 9th grade and was enrolled in many elective courses. With two years in the high school, he has

accumulated 28 credits "most of them electives," he recalls. With LUCHA he was able to take core courses in Spanish that count towards graduation to finish his graduation requirements, he took the TAKS and was awaiting the results at the time of his interview with me.

Taking Advantage of the Dual Language Waiver

This large independent school district has the Dual-Language Immersion program from TEA (2007) which among other things provides a waiver to the school to give credits to courses and tests given in other languages than English. In this case, the Dual-Language Immersion program is in Spanish, so the LUCHA courses can be taken as support and for credit depending on the school decision. Most of the LUCHA courses of core subjects like Math and Science have been compared to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and have passed the test of alignment to the TEKS with over 70%. This fact has prompted the K-16 Education Center at UT to recommend these courses for credit in Dual-Language Immersion Programs when these programs are available in the school districts. This waiver affords Valley ISD special opportunities, and Ms Vidaurri and Ms Smith are helping the school and the students through this waiver.

Ms Vidaurri is very aware that you can only support what you know well, and she is eager to inform the audience about the program so that they know that ELL high school students benefit from it, and are not hurt by taking courses in Spanish. She said,

> *Yo le veo muchas cosas positivas, la verdad, le veo muchas cosas positivas, pero sí creo que hay que informar, ¿informar a quienes? A los padres, a los estudiantes, hay que informar a los consejeros, a los maestros mismos, a los jefes de departamento, a sus maestros. (Informar) de que con el programa no los estamos perjudicando, al contrario, los estamos ayudando.* (Interview, May, 2008)

> I see that it offers many positive things, to tell you the truth, I see many positive things, but I do believe that it's necessary to inform – inform whom? The parents, the students; we need to inform the counselors, and even the teachers themselves, the department heads, their teacher, so that they can see that with the program we are not harming them, on the contrary, we are helping them.

Ms Vidaurri received support from the school administration. She would talk to the principal and the asistant pincipal when she needed something for the program. Ms Vidaurri recalls the support from the school administration with her asistant principal's communication with her when she told me, "*Ella me dice, pues tú sabes del programa más que yo y lo que necesites, eso es*."(She told me, well, you know more about the program than I do, so whatever you need, that's what there will be.) She talked to other teachers and could get the support from some of them. This proved beneficial on the rare occasions when Ms Vidaurri needed assistance in explaining particular course content to the students in that she could find a content teacher who would collaborate with her to help the student.

Even in this positive and supportive atmosphere, not all the teachers were convinced of the benefits of LUCHA. The skeptics were convinced that having the students take courses in Spanish was not going to help them pass the TAKS. They would say that students benefitted more from attending the classes in English and forcing them to learn the language was the best way. Counselors on the other hand, wanted to help the students advance, and saw in LUCHA a way to have students obtain the credits they were missing to pass to the next grade, and sometimes avoid taking TAKS, and to graduate.

Ms Vidaurri's vision on how the program could benefit ELL students became a reality in part because she knew which doors to knock on and which strings to pull. Her social capital contributed to her ability to bring key people into her enthusiastic perspective. She would talk to the school principal to convince him of the bountifulness of the program and obtained his support. The principal allowed her to take one full day off her normal duties to invite ELL students into her program at the beginning of the school year.2007-2008 when the program started to function for a full year.

To let her have '*la última palabra'* (the last word) in this section, there is a quote in which she reiterates what sustains her and encourages her to work with these students using the LUCHA program.

> *Lo que me llamó mucho la atención y por la cual sigo en el programa todavía es ver la satisfacción de estos estudiantes cuando después de que les llega el análisis que hace la universidad de Texas, ven que obtienen desde 2, 3, 6, y hasta 11 créditos de clases que habían tomado ellos en México.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> What really attracted me and what still keeps me going in the program is to see the satisfaction of these students when, after the analysis that the University of Texas performed arrives, they see that they obtained from 2, 3, 6 and even up to 11 credits for classes that they had taken in Mexico.

Anatomy of a Disappointment

In contrast, Mr. Domínguez, a Math teacher at Hayward HS came close to being demoralized by the experience of being put in charge of the LUCHA program which was not nearly as successfully realized as it was in the school with Ms Vidaurri in charge. As will be shown, the obstacles he had to overcome were too many and of such magnitude that this teacher even questioned his place in the school. His spirit was damaged and his

attempts at leadership were frustrated. His own experience and perspective did not provide him with the social capital he needed to be successful or effective in the face of such daunting negativity and opposition.

He was born and raised in Mexico and earned a degree in Engineering from the *Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León* (UANL). He had worked as an engineer in a *maquiladora* in the border town of Reynosa. He had not been trained as a teacher before he got his teaching certificate to teach at Hayward, his first school.

The rationale for his selection to head LUCHA at his school, at least from the perspective of the administration, was based almost solely on the fact that he was able to teach Mathematics and that he was bilingual. His willingness to work with LUCHA students, is certainly to his credit, and he responded to what the administration at his school said was necessary.

When Mr. Domínguez. was assigned to work with the LUCHA students at Hayward HS, he was happy and enthusiastic about the program because he liked the idea that the students were given a chance to recuperate some of the credits for courses they took in Mexico before coming to the U.S. He found that opportunity to be fair for the incoming students. His knowledge of academic Spanish and knowledge of the culture were deemed sufficient requisites for the tasks assigned to him. As Mr. Salinas, one of the counselors in the school with LUCHA students mentioned, "He knows the culture and speaks their language…" (Interview, May 2008)

Mr. Domínguez acknowledged that at the beginning there was lack of information on how the program could work or would work better in different settings. The school

was pioneering the LUCHA program and there were new procedures that nobody really knew how to handle. In this school, the initiation of the program was complicated from the start by the lack of a reliable and knowledgeable network. When problems arose, there was nowhere to turn. Cohen and Prusack (2001) identify this need as critical in organizations.

> The "lived experience" of an organization or the work of particular group can only be known by being there. The valuable knowledge and practice of how things really get done reside in networks and communities. (p.64)

To start with the LUCHA class that January 2007, school administrators decided to transfer all the students in the Math classes whose dominant language was Spanish and who had flunked the first semester of their current math course –Algebra I, Geometry or Algebra 2, as well as any other math students who were recent immigrant from Mexico. The rationale was that if the students with problems in Math classes were Spanish dominant, and particularly if they were recent Mexican immigrants, their main trouble with the Math class was due to their language barrier and not to the subject per se. Since the school has the Dual Language Immersion waiver, students could be taught and tested in a different language than English.

This was carried out as an administrative decision and the students were not consulted as to their preference or asked to give their own assessment and suggestions of what would be most helpful in their learning situation. All the students who met the criteria set to be in the LUCHA class were transferred from their math course to the newly open LUCHA course.

The absence of a supportive community obviously affected the way decisions were made and their often negative impact. Talking with hindsight, Mr. Domínguez regretted the school's decision, to move the students from the Math class in English to the all Spanish Math LUCHA class. This decision appears to have been made from the top-down, arbitrarily, and in a way that lumped all the students together, rather than one in which each student's needs and situation were evaluated and valued. Some were passing the class in English and nevertheless were transferred to the LUCHA math class in Spanish. Others were not passing the regular math class and they were transferred to start the online class from the start to obtain all the course credit at the end of their LUCHA course. Domínguez said,

> *Mira, lo que pasó es que aunque fuera programa nuevo, faltó información en este programa. Entonces, realmente, nadie sabía cómo estaba funcionando. Lo que pasó es que empezamos a mitad de año, en el segundo semestre, y los alumnos que yo tenía, estaban en una clase de matemáticas. Por ejemplo, muchos estaban en Algebra I algunos estaban en Geometría, todos en clases regulares... No estaban aislados, estaban con gente que es de aquí de este lado (de la frontera en E.U.)… Entonces lo que hicieron para el segundo semestre, (fue que) les quitaron esa clase y los metieron en LUCHA. A los que habían pasado el primer semestre, les dieron crédito por ese semestre y los hicieron que continuaran el segundo semestre en LUCHA. Algunos que no pasaron la clase y no había recibido crédito, empezaron en LUCHA desde el principio de Algebra I para obtener todo el crédito.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> Look, what happened was that even though this was a new program, there was lack of information about it. So really, nobody really knew how it worked. What happened was that we started in the middle of the school year, in the second semester, and the students that I had were in a math class (already.) For example, many were in Algebra I, some in Geometry, and all of them were in regular classes… they were not isolated; they were studying with other students from here, from this side (of the border in the U.S.)… So what they did for the second semester was that they took away their regular math class and they put them in the LUCHA class. Those students that had passed their math course the first semester kept their

> credit for the first semester but they made them continue in LUCHA for the second semester. The ones that had not passed their math course the first semester did not receive credit and began in LUCHA from the beginning with Algebra 1 (course in Spanish on-line) in order to obtain credit.

As has been mentioned, the most useful and at present the most cost –effective service of LUCHA, which was also the most encouraging and validating one for the immigrant students was the transcript analysis. In this school, rather than this service being carried out as a matter of course for all eligible students, the decision was left to various personnel with varying degrees of understanding and commitment to its implementation which created a situation in which some students were not afforded the opportunity to benefit from this service. The option of requesting student transcripts from Mexico and to ask for student transcript analysis was left to the counselors and the school assistant principal. Mr. Domínguez did his best to move the process along. He recounted what actually happened:

> *El año pasado cada consejero se encargó de mandar pedir el 'transcript analysis' de los alumnos que le correspondía… y pues cada consejero agarró uno o dos o los que le tocaban y mandó pedir los 'transcripts' para poderles dar crédito a esas clases que ya habían tomado en México. Llegaban los 'transcripts' y así como llegaron en un sobre, así se quedaron… Nunca se les dio crédito, nunca se les dio crédito…* (Interview, May, 2008)

> Last year, each counselor was in charge of requesting the transcript analysis for their students… and so each counselor got a hold of one or two of those that were their responsibility, and sent requests for the transcripts to be able to grant credit for the classes that the students had already taken in Mexico. The transcripts arrived and just as they came, in an envelope, that's the way they stayed. The students were never given credit; they were never given credit.

Mr. Domínguez' frustration about the lack of student support through the LUCHA program in the school could not be hidden when he referred to his efforts to obtain the information UT sent to the school, and the lack of supervision on the process to grant students with the credits for their prior studies in Mexico. He said,

> *Yo en lo personal, a mis alumnos que tenía el año pasado, lo pedí muchas veces, de que yo quería ver los 'transcripts' para ver pues 'quien le da a quien (de los consejeros), y qué tenía cada quién (de los créditos que les correspondían a los alumnos, y qué había logrado cada uno por medio del 'transcripts'. Yo requerí copias o algo de los 'transcripts' de mis alumnos pero nunca obtuve nada.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> I personally asked many times about the transcript analysis of the students I had last year. I wanted to see which counselor would deal with which student, and what credits were recommended to which students, and which were their achievements shown in the transcript analysis. I requested copies or proof of my students' transcript analysis, but I never obtained anything.

He continued taking with great frustration he was not able to hide, "*No sé qué pasó, nunca se le dio seguimiento, no supe quien tenía quién, no supe nada.*" (I do not know what happened, but this was never tracked (supervised.) I could never know who had what. I knew nothing.)

It is clear that the apathetic and ultimately irresponsible behavior of school personnel deprived students of the credits they deserved and the boost they would have felt in advancing in their high school careers in the United States. Mr. Domínguez, the incredulity apparent in his voice on recollecting the situation, said:

> *Si, pues, no hay apoyo. ...muchos estudiantes ya perdieron todo un año tomando clases que no debía haber tomado...Son aquellos alumnos que como el año pasado les llegaban sus transcripts (analizados) y se quedaron en un cajón.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> Yes, well, they're no help…many students already lost the whole year taking classes that they should not have taken…They're students like those last year who had transcripts (analyzed) that stayed in a drawer.

Ms Paz and Mr. Lazo reported having a difficult time with this school in general. They mentioned on several occasions that the counselors in this school did not like the procedure to request LUCHA services, which originally was done through fax only. Counselors had to download a form, fill it out by hand, and send the form and the documents through fax. Among other things, they did not want to have to fill out the school contact person information, which was their own information, every time they filled out a request. The form would ask information about the student they had to look for and they did not like that. This was time consuming for them. This complaint made the LUCHA team evaluate its procedures and look for improvements. The requests were changed to an online enrollment system where the different LUCHA services could be requested.

Another problem with the counselors at this particular school was that they were not very organized. They would lose track of the LUCHA students they had, and would not complete the forms accurately or completely. It was Ms Paz who would offer to fill them out for them and then fax them to the central office in Austin.

Although highly motivated, Mr. Domínguez did not seem to be able to communicate with the counselors in a way that would get done what was needed. His previous work experience had been as an engineer with many people under his supervision. He was not someone other people in the school felt they needed to pay much attention to, particularly because he was often pointing out shortcomings and sloppy procedures. Although they may have taken it personally, his real devotion was to the students and his efforts were on their behalf.

He would get frustrated with the counselors' response to him as they would keep stalling when he needed to get an answer or they would simply not provide the information he needed. Later, he avoided communication with the UT staff feeling that they would not respond to his needs. This was a very unfortunate decision. Neither would he ask UT personnel for help when having trouble with the LUCHA math courses which had various inherent problems. In speaking of LUCHA personnel, he remarked:

> *Yo casi no los vi este año para nada, si acaso una vez, porque dos ya son muchas… Seguramente si los hubiera llamado, hubieran venido, pero ya no los busqué. Yo hacía lo mejor que podía hasta en donde estaban mis posibilidades, y lo sigo y lo seguiré haciendo.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> I barely saw them this year, maybe I saw them once, because if I saw them twice, it was a lot… Surely, if I had called them, they would have come, but since I didn't look for them. I did the best I could, to the best of my ability, and I continue and will continue doing that.

When LUCHA started in the school, students and Mr. Domínguez got a new schedule to have students taking their LUCHA math course during school day time. Mr. Domínguez was to conduct the LUCHA Math courses during the first block of the day in a computer lab class. This new schedule designated that both his planning period and his parent-conference period be held after the school day. Showing how he would accommodate to his new packed daily schedule for the students' benefit, Mr. Domínguez said, "*Obviamente, era más fácil que yo me quedara después durante hora y media a que los alumnos se quedaran después de la escuela por hora y media*." (Obviously, it was much easier to have me stay for an hour and a half after school, than to have the students stay after school for an hour and a half.)

Ms Villa gave an administrative perspective on the schedule decision saying, "We did not have to deal with parents' approval, nor deal with transportation problems that way." This comment suggests on the one hand, the notion that the parents' wishes were not paramount in the schools criteria for decision making. This of course, also meant that they did not recognize the potentially beneficial result of reaching out to the parents and acknowledging their importance in their children's education and progress in the United States (Flood & Lapp, 1996).

From the start, it was clear that the school saw these immigrant students as a liability, in that there was great concern that they be able to pass Math so as not to 'mess up' the AYP statistics, and ultimately to be able to pass the exit tests in English and graduate. As Ms Villa the assistant principal said when asked about the beginnings of LUCHA in her school:

> We also had a teacher that was willing to do it, that was Mr. Domínguez, and we gave him a lab, made it a class so that made it a lot easier for those kids to be involved in the LUCHA program the first year. The second year we had it, which is this year, it was a little bit more difficult because we had, we were under the gun for AYP that those students… we needed (them) to be in a geometry class if they were tenth graders. So we wanted to take those students to make sure they had enough math classes to pass the math for AYP and also to do the exit test for the eleventh grade. So we offered the class for LUCHA before school or after school so we took a vote for how many kids could come early or stay and they said, "No, we'll come early." So we had the program in the morning so automatically that lowered the numbers because a lot of the kids… they don't want to go and spend time when they could go and congregate with their friends so a lot of them opted to socialize instead of take advantage of the program. But we did still have some kids that did get into the program this year. (Interview, May 2008)

The assistant principal talked about a lot of concerns, which were characterized as problems of having LUCHA in their school. First, the worry about the AYP, which was

an important factor in decision making about the schedule sine time spent in LUCHA classes was perceived as an interruption of time devoted to AYP preparation. In this view, LUCHA was not to be trusted to help because it is not in English. It seems that the perception is that the student will not be able to pass math in English if he received a math class in Spanish. The school administrators did not think that the Math instruction would transfer from Spanish to English. And they had a reason to believe that, since they were not planning activities to have the students' transition into the mainstream program using the LUCHA courses. The extra school input in the LUCHA courses at the school could not be relied upon, and students were not placed in ESL courses.

It became obvious that the school as a whole did not 'buy in' to the LUCHA program and its benefits to the school and the students. Ironically, as was demonstrated in the haphazard handling of the transcripts, this attitude in fact deprived the school of some of the most dependable and cost-effective benefits. It is practically a truism, but nonetheless ignored that there needs to support or a "buy in" from the people involved for a program to be successful (Fashola & Slavin, 1997; Stringfield, Millsap, & Herman, 2005). A publication from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT, 1999):

> …One of the most important ways to achieve the benefits of a well-designed program is to make sure that those who will use it –teachers and other school staff—are fully committed to the program before its implementation. Many districts have learned—often the hard way—that even the most effective programs can fail to raise student achievement if poorly implemented. (Interview, May, 2008)

The school administration had several concerns with the LUCHA program throughout the two year period researched for this dissertation. One of their worries was having all students in 10th grade taking Geometry because of the TAKS tests. Another

one of their concerns was having the internet as a medium of instruction, as well. They had to make sure that the students had Geometry in a directed class. Ms Villa said,

> …they wanted the teacher, the direct teaching done with the student rather than having it done just over the internet or over the computer. They felt, we felt as a campus that we needed that student to be with a teacher and direct instruction given to them so they can be ready for taking the exit level or tenth grade math. (Interview, May 2008)

The perception is that there is no way a student can be ready to take the exit level TAKS test if the instruction has not been in a group class. This defeats the purpose of individualized learning through the computer with the LUCHA courses, where each student advances at his own pace.

Another problem the administration saw was in the LUCHA teacher, or the teacher they could assign to work with the students in the LUCHA program. They limited themselves to Mr. Domínguez, the math tutor and limited him to tutor only math classes. Even though, Ms Paz, the UT promoter in the area had explained to them that the LUCHA program could work well in a more comprehensive way, the district and this school in particular, did not want to risk expanding the offering to other courses in which the LUCHA teacher was not certified .In other districts, when a LUCHA tutor was not a specialist in the content of all the LUCHA subjects, that individual could ask the teacher of record for the subject in question to explain and clarify the doubts students might have. In this school, that was not considered an option and the possibilities were not explored.

Mr. Domiguez had found out from UT personnel that he could have been a tutor in other courses. Not only did he feel dismayed that the students were being deprived of opportunities, but that school administrators apparently did not have confidence in his

ability to perform duties that LUCHA tutors in other schools were being encouraged to undertake. He related:

> *...pero a lo que me dijeron a mí es que yo no estaba certificado para dar créditos de otras clases. No porque yo no quisiera, pero a mí fue lo que me dijeron, y ahí me pararon. (Yo dije) Bueno, como ustedes decidan. Yo les dije, "Ms Paz me dijo que se puede hacer de esta manera. Sé que se puede si le queremos hacer, vamos a darle para adelante, pero si no creen que se puede o no quieren, pues es cuestión de ustedes, yo sigo órdenes.* (Interview, May, 2008)

> …but what they told me is that I was not certified to give credits in other classes. It is not because I didn't want to do it, but it's them – they told me this and they stopped me right there. (I said) OK, whatever you say. I said, "Ms Paz told me it can be done in this way. I know we can do it if we want to, we can move forward with it, but if you don't believe that it can be done, or if you don't want to do it, then it's your call. I follow orders.

Palma ISD

LUCHA began at Palma ISD one year after it had been operating in the other three districts in this study. In a number of ways it is not correct to make a point-by-point comparison with Palma and the other districts, not only because Palma was like one of the younger children in a large family who often has a smoother road because of the older children's advice, but because it was a much larger district than the other three. Even with these realities in mind, my field notes reflect something different and positive about Palma. What works for this district is not prescriptive for all districts, but there are lessons to be learned.

Palma began to institute LUCHA services slowly, methodically and selectively. My field notes reflect that I was not convinced that was the best strategy. At the time, it appeared to me that it was an error for the district to fail to take advantage of all the

LUCHA services from the beginning. In fact, this strategy proved to be excellent planning on their part. In my field notes, I recorded my thinking writing the following,

> I think that this district is making a mistake. I don't understand why they are not taking advantage of all the services the LUCHA program offers, and Ms Paz seems to be encouraging them to follow their current path. It seems to me like a waste of time to have only the transcript services when the students could be benefiting from the LUCHA courses as well. I am sure many of these students are repeating courses they already took in Mexico and they are just sitting in classes where they are bored. Of course some of them are thinking of dropping out and perhaps the program will lose some students before they get the chance to take courses and advance on their credits. I wished the district would reconsider. (Field Notes, February, 2008)

I had visited several school districts that had the LUCHA program and found that the person in charge of the program at district level usually was the Bilingual director or the Special populations' director who had the bilingual program as one of the responsibilities.

At Palma ISD, things were different. Totally surprised to find a counselor in charge of the LUCHA program in a school district, I asked, "… and what does a counselor have to do with the LUCHA program?" "*Todo, absolutamente todo*" (Everything, absolutely everything), said Ms Figueroa, the curriculum specialist joining my conversation with Ms Cárdenas, the Secondary ESL counselor. "Well, yes. They are right, LUCHA has to do with a counselor when this counselor has to do with the Bilingual Department in the district," It was explained to me that in this school district there is an ESL counselor position at district level that is not open in all school districts. It is the size of the district that makes it necessary. This is a school district of about 50,000 students with over 50% in the Bilingual program from elementary school to high school.

The LUCHA program serves ELL students who are immigrants from Mexico in five high schools that range in size between 2,000 and 3,000 students.

Figueroa added, "Our academic counselors deal with graduation plans, and they are constantly checking everybody's graduation plan. She's doing just that for ESL students, and that's exactly where the LUCHA component comes in… The LUCHA component has to do with the transcripts and graduation because every credit that the kids are awarded through LUCHA is one less credit that they have to earn in the American system, in the state of Texas system. So that's where her component is." Explaining her role with the LUCHA program, Figueroa said, "My component in this LUCHA service business is the PEIMS[5] service ID number and making sure that the PEIMS service ID that is identified by the University of Texas is what we are given equivalency to in our in-house number in the system." (Field Notes, May 2008)

One Woman's Passion and Experience Sets the Tone

Mrs. Cárdenas had heard about LUCHA from a bilingual leader in the Corona ISD. That was the spark. Ms Cárdenas, District Bilingual Counselor explained that after a Bilingual directors' meeting of Region 1 in Texas, her boss, at Palma ISD mentioned that the bilingual director of Corona ISD had a presentation on the LUCHA program that among other things, made an analysis of Mexican transcripts to give student credits. Cárdenas added,

[5] The PEIMS numbers they refer to are the high school course ID numbers in the Texas Education Agency. PEIMS stands for Public Education Information Management System, and the numbers are used for students' graduation records. They are so important to keep track of courses that Palma ISD asked UT to include the course PEIMS numbers in the Transcript Analysis they provide for the LUCHA students. UT made the change adding this information besides the list of all the high school courses students took in Mexico. This to show areas of specialization the student could have.

Yo trabajé 6 años en una preparatoria en un área de la ciudad muy poblada por inmigrantes recientes al país, ¡entonces yo siempre peleé eso! Que no les dábamos crédito de nada; era una injusticia tremenda.
Entonces, en cuando me dijo ella (my boss), se me pararon los oídos… es más, fui y me metí a Internet y lo traté de encontrar, ¡y no pude! Entonces, empecé a buscar a esta señora (que dio la presentación del programa LUCHA)… estaba fuera de la ciudad por una semana, si no me equivoco. Y le hablé 3 veces en el transcurso de esa semana… y dije, ¡Ay! no me vaya no a hablar, ¡y yo quería mucho saber!
Total que ella, muy cortés me habló, y muy atenta me dio mucha información. Le hice '20 mil preguntas' y ella me dio el número de Mr. Lazo, (el promotor de UT en el area)… Entonces Mr. Lazo me invitó a (el distrito escolar de) Ryan. (Interview, May, 2008)

I worked for six years in a high school in a city area with a high population of recent immigrants, and I always fought for that! We were not giving them any credit (for prior studies); that was a terrible injustice.
So, when my boss told me about it, I immediately became all ears. I even went on the Internet and tried to find more information, but I could not find anything! Then, I started to look for the lady, the one who gave the presentation on the LUCHA program… she was out of town for a week if I am not mistaken. And I called her three times that week… and I said to myself, ¡Ay! What if she does not call me back and I wanted to know about it so much!
In the end, she courteously returned my call and kindly provided me with a lot of information. I asked her a thousand questions, and she gave me Mr Lazo's phone number (the UT promoter in the area)… Then, Mr. Lazo invited me to visit Ryan ISD.

Cárdenas explains how excited she was when she visited Ryan ISD because she had the opportunity to meet Dr Alanis who was visiting the district. After asking him all the questions she could think of, she was thinking,

Y, ¿cómo le voy a hacer yo? ¿Cómo voy a implementar esto? (Mi preocupación) Es que somos muy grandes. Tengo 5 preparatorias. (Interview, May, 2008)

And, how am I going to do it? How will I implement this? (My worry) is that we are so big (as a district.) I have five high schools.

From the start, she believed LUCHA was a great program that could be a successful way to bolster the academic proficiency of the ELLs in her student population. She did not want LUCHA to be just another good program that would eventually be forgotten because of a lack of good implementation and follow-up. She commented,

> *Yo trabajo con las preparatorias, por eso mi interés. También tengo 20 años en educación, entonces, yo sé que muchas veces,… o sea, en mi carrera yo he visto… en mis años de educación yo he visto muchos programas que van y vienen, y mucha veces tal vez han sido buenos, pero por falta de planeación y de implementación, al rato se olvida uno de ellos. Entonces, yo no sé; tenía una desesperación; quería pensar y quería saber, ¡Ay! y el pobre Dr. Alanis ha de haber pensado… "y esta vieja, ¿de dónde la sacaron? ¿y qué quiere?"* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> I work with the high schools and this is my interest. I also have twenty years in education, so, I know that many times – well, in my career I have seen, in my years of education, I have seen many programs that come and go, and many times, maybe they were good, but they're forgotten after a little while for lack of (good) planning and implementation. So, (talking with a lot of passion in the subject) I don't know; I was very anxious about it; I wanted to think and wanted to know. ¡Ay!, and poor Dr. Alanis, I don't know what he must have thought… "and this little old lady, where did they get her from? And what does she want?"

She was very pleased with everything Dr. Alanis explained to her that day and recalled, "*Yo entendí que tenía unas posibilidades tremendas para los alumnos de mi distrito*. (I understood that the program had great possibilities for the students in my district.) She was very excited to be able to provide students with credit for prior studies they had before coming to the U.S. through an institution like the University of Texas. She said,

> *UT se considera como una agencia acreditada y es un programa ya comprobado, verificado, etc. Entonces, a nosotros no nos están llegando los créditos de México, nos están llegando los créditos de UT.* (Interview, May, 2008)

> UT is considered like an accredited agency and it is a program that has already been proven, verified, etc. So, for us, the credits are not arriving from Mexico, the credits are arriving to us from UT.

She is able to appreciate the social capital that UT possesses, and appreciates that it is being used to ease the path for the students LUCHA serves. She also speaks with assured confidence about what will happen for the students she oversees in the future. One cannot imagine a situation where requests for transcripts or their analysis from UT will be languishing in a drawer. One cannot imagine that a student's future will be left in the hands of an apathetic employee, or one who does not act because there is not awareness of the importance and exciting potential of the program.

She does not talk about 'the district,' but 'my district.' When she thinks of the future, she is enthusiastic about the possibilities that she will be a part of and that will be a part of her. She positions herself as what Stanton-Salazar (1995) designates as an "institutional agent" that is someone within a school or school system who, through their ties to the students can be of great assistance to the students in their effort to succeed in school and navigate the unfamiliar world around them.

Ms Cárdenas had many concerns as she considered the challenges she was likely to face in her district, she commented:

> *Yo conozco a mi gente, yo conozco (bien) a mi gente… y es más, en cada una de las escuelas, aunque estoy haciendo lo mismo, lo estoy haciendo de una manera un poquito diferente porque yo conozco a mi gente.* (Interview, May, 2008)

> I know my people, I know my people (well)… and this is why in each school, even though I am doing the same thing, I doing it in a way that is a little bit different because I know my people.

In this deceptively simple statement, she is acknowledging the need for what Bourdieu (1977) calls 'context-sensitive rules' to mitigate the fact that different discourses can be hegemonic in different locales. She also seemed to acknowledge that each school, and perhaps each person brought their own funds of knowledge and experience to the situation, and all these factors and more needed to be considered in finding the best way to make the program work. She seems to exemplify what Engster (2004) suggests are care ethics. There are a number of different ways of defining care ethics, but a core element in all definitions is an emphasis on the concrete and particular (Dancy, 1992). Care ethics takes the concrete needs of particular individuals as the starting point for what must be done (Tronto, 1993).

She knew from the start that if she wanted this program to have the strength and the success she envisioned for it she was going to be the one to lead it. This is due in part to the fact that she was the only one in the district Bilingual department with teaching and counseling experience at secondary and high school levels. She also knew she could draw on her passion for and experience with LEP and ESL newcomer students in particular.

Ms Cárdenas did not fear the magnitude of the project. She had just finished another project at her highly populated school district where teachers had become capable of identifying students who were LEP in Special Education and Gifted and Talented Programs through the computerized class roster in all schools. This way, "teachers could help us monitor the former students in the bilingual program. We have to monitor them by law for two consecutive years after they are no longer officially qualified as ELLs. Besides this is a must if we want teachers to provide special support to these students,"

explained Ms Figueroa, a district curriculum specialist who would provide support to Ms Cárdenas at the district level.

An Orderly Plan for Student Progress

This school district took its time in implementing the LUCHA program. Ms Cárdenas was asked to devise a plan for the school board to approve in December 2007. The plan was approved before the Holidays and implementation began at the beginning of January 2008.

> *Yo creo que mucho tuvo que ver la implementación de nuestro programa. Nosotros tuvimos la ventaja de que aprendimos de otros distritos que ya habían empezado con el programa. Fueron muy amables en decirnos los errores que tuvieron para que no los cometiéramos.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> I think that a lot of it had to do with the implementation of our program. We had the advantage that we learned from other districts that had already started with the program. They were very cordial in telling us the errors that they had made, so that we would not do the same.

The phases of the plan were clearly delineated and orderly. Students were not going to fall through the cracks, and in this case, at least, no ELL would be left behind. The following material is part of the plan that was submitted to and approved by the Palma School Board.

> Phase I
> Transcript analysis
>
> Transcript Analysis will be implemented at all 5 Palma (pseydonym) high schools in January 2008. A cohort of students that entered the school district's high schools in 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 has been identified. ESL Counselor and Lead Teacher along with UTA support staff will hold meetings with counselors, students and parents to disseminate information about the project as well as procedural information for staff.

> High School Principals must identify a counselor as LUCHA designee/contact. Transcript evaluations (see back page) from UTA will be forwarded to that counselor only.
>
> LUCHA Counselor designee will be responsible for forwarding transcript analysis to each student's respective counselor and ensuring that out-of-district transcript forms are completed and the registrar of the school posts credits awarded on the student's official high school transcript.

The implementation of the LUCHA program was planned in two main phases and a timeline was prepared. In the first phase, students were identified; there was a vast dissemination of information on the program, transcripts were collected, and the requests for LUCHA to perform transcript analysis were submitted. When the transcript analysis arrived at the schools, students were awarded the recommended credit. In some cases this meant that students required changes in their schedules so that they would not be taking courses they had already studied in Mexico. The timeline to make this change was tight for the UT personnel performing the transcript analysis. Sometimes, Mexican high schools took a long time to send their information to UT, and in some cases, unfortunately, they refused or they could not send UT the information requested. These occurrences significantly delayed the turnaround process and the transcript analysis of some students arrived too late for the school to change the students' schedule. In some instances, the transcript analysis could not be performed and the school was notified of the situation. "Palma ISD was very patient about it and they were not going to move the students from classes. As long as they did not have their transcript analysis, they were doing what they were doing before LUCHA, putting students in the 9th grade and making them take all their high school courses," said Ms Paz.

During the summer 2008, the LUCHA courses pilot program took place. And, once the district experienced what they needed to implement the LUCHA courses, all high schools started offering LUCHA courses the following school year.

The Culture of Caring at Work

Mrs. Cárdenas set up meetings with student cohorts in the schools as well as with their parents. She met with teachers of science and the math department in each school to help identify students that could benefit from the LUCHA program. Although it would have been easier and faster to arrange a school meeting to inform all staff about the program, she took a longer and more personal route to effective communication. She strategically met with teachers of each discipline and invited them to the LUCHA lab, so that they could try the LUCHA courses and know what their students were learning in them. Ms Cárdenas said,

> *No los quería ni mezclados en cada escuela. Parte de la razón era que empezamos con muchas dudas y por eso no quise llamar a un grupo grande sino preferí grupos por separado.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> I didn't want to even mix up (the groups) en each school. Part of the reason was that we began with many doubts, and for this reason I didn't want to call together a large group, but rather I preferred separate groups.

Ms Cárdenas is a firm believer that the right environment fosters open and clear communications. She said,

> *Yo creo mucho en que la gente se siente más en confianza con su propia gente y expresa… lo bueno, lo malo y lo indiferente. …y si se me hizo una cosa muy efectiva.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> It is my firm belief that people feel more comfortable with their own, and they express, the good, the bad, and the indifferent… and it seemed to me a very effective way of doing it.

She seems to express the notion that it is important that people be allowed to express themselves in an authentic way, and that it is what counts – that they feel comfortable to say not just the polite, expected things one would hear in a school meeting, but what comes from real life.

Ms Cárdenas attributes her skills as part of the personality traits and her personal philosophy. She said, "*Como le digo a mi hijo, apréndete claramente que es más importante la cortesía que la inteligencia*." (Like I tell my son, learn clearly that courtesy is more important than intelligence.) In this short advisory, she is communicating the basis of the cultural notion of '*ser bien educado*' which acknowledges cultural funds of knowledge that exist within and without other societal structures (Jackson, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). With this philosophy put into practice, Ms Cárdenas found it to be of the utmost importance to approach every group in each school in a particular and strategic way.

Ms Cárdenas' past experience as a high school counselor helped her work with counselors and helped her understand their stressful job. Although she took all this into consideration, she recognized it was of primary importance that the counselors accept the LUCHA program for the students' benefit. She said,

> *…el trabajo de consejera es espantoso porque es una presión (muy grande) y resulta que tú siempre vas a ser la culpable de que esto no se hizo… te dan veinte mil cosas que hacer… es un trabajo muy presionado.* (Interview, May, 2008)

> … the counselor's job it overwhelming because it's a job with a lot of stress, as it happen that you are always the guilty party of when things are not done… they give you twenty thousand things to do… it's a very stressful job.

She was very much aware of her delicate position while communicating with the counselors, but was confident on her endeavor. She commented,

> *Entonces, iba a haber casos en los que una cosa más, y se convierte en la gotita que derrama el vaso, y yo las entiendo, o sea, entonces… Nada más, (se trata) de manejar caracteres más que otra cosa.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> So, there were going to be occasions in which one more thing added becomes the drop that makes the cup overflow and I understand them. I mean, then… It's mainly dealing with different personalities more than anything else.

Ms Cárdenas arranged informative presentations with student cohorts and their parents. It was important to let them know that taking courses in Spanish in the U.S. was actually more convenient for their children at this time and was not a step backwards. She got an excellent response, and once parents understood how these courses fit into the overall plan for their children, they bought into the program.

During this educational process, she received comments pro and con. "There were people who told me, this is excellent. We are so glad that a program like this is finally starting. But, I also received comments like, you are out of you mind if you think that students learning in Spanish are going to pass the TAKS. This is a waste of time and resources."

Her response was,

> *Como seres humanos, tenemos temor al cambio…Tenían que saber que este no es un programa que regala créditos… toman sus clases de LUCHA y están pasando sus TAKS… Todo este apoyo les da mucho ánimo para ayudarse.* (Interview, May, 2008)
>
> As human beings, we're all afraid of change… They had to know that this is not a program for easy credits… students take their LUCHA courses,

> and they are passing the TAKS… All this help them have a lot of enthusiasm to help themselves.

The first LUCHA teacher, who piloted the summer program, was hand-picked by Ms Cárdenas and after some bureaucratic difficulties that had to do with the certification of a Mexican teacher, she began. As with Ms Cárdenas' other decisions, this one was excellent, since the teacher saw what needed to be done to tailor the courses to the students.

"The LUCHA courses are teacher driven, and it took a lot of effort from the LUCHA teacher to help the students in all subjects," said Ms Paz, the UT promoter. "Somebody has to modify and adjust and to take responsibility," she added. The teacher needs to grade the students' course activities and exams for some of the courses that did not have the exams ready.

Through an additional financial arrangement, Palma ISD benefitted from a more constant presence of UT LUCHA staff that helped prepare and modify existing materials. "We did not cut corners and we made sure that the TEKS and the TAKS objectives that they (the courses) were lacking were addressed," she added. Ms Paz, the UT resource for this school district, developed a customized LUCHA handbook for this school district that follows all their policies, "…including their grading (and) their scheduling because every district is different," she said. She also included a gradebook and a CD with information on the courses this district was going to use. She identified the activities in the course, the *cuaderno de actividad* activities that would better address the concepts, and walked the LUCHA teacher through the courses.

Ms Paz guided the first LUCHA teacher at Palma ISD during the summer of 2008 when the LUCHA course pilot program was in place at the district. Amazed by the teacher's ability to teach across the curriculum, she recalled, "This teacher was very smart… You still need the teacher for the student to pass these courses. *Ella se acordaba de matemáticas, 'biology', 'chemistry'. En economía, ella lo leía y lo explicaba.*" (… She could recall her knowledge of math, biology, chemistry. In economics (course), she would read and then explain the content.) The pilot was successful in that all students passed all their courses and acquired the credit. The following school year, the district implemented LUCHA labs in each high school to have LUCHA students take about 1000 online courses.

Results that Make the District Happy

Perhaps it is not coincidence that the Palma School District is the most open about its accountability standards and achievements with respect to its LUCHA students. Although other districts have said that they are 'keeping track' and although statistics about schools and various subpopulations are public record, the LUCHA students per se do not form one of these groups. At this time, LUCHA does not require that schools or districts gather this information or submit it.

It is clear that passing the TAKS is a step which is often a stumbling block to graduation, and that is certainly the case for adolescent ELLs. The first full academic year that LUCHA was implemented in the district, 138 LUCHA students took the TAKS tests, and a very good percentage of them (72% to 93% per school) passed at least one TAKS test. More amazingly, 27.5% of these students passed all four TAKS, and three of

these students passed their TAKS with commendable scores. 23.2% passed three of the four TAKS, 18.9% passed 2, and 13.8% passed one. Only 16.7% of the LUCHA exit level TAKS testers did not pass any of the tests. Another merit was that Palma ISD has had these students, who are now taking their TAKS, mainly for two and three years in the school. This means that these students are likely to graduate with their cohort and not afterwards, which is highly motivating to students. (See table below.)

Palma ISD /LUCHA Exit Level TAKS Scores 2008-2009

Passing 4/4 = 38/138 = 27.5%	4 Years = 22/138 = 16.0%
Passing 3/4 = 32/138 = 23.2%	3 Years = 48/138 = 34.8%
Passing 2/4 = 26/138 = 18.9%	2 Years = 66/138 = 47.8%
Passing 1/4 = 19/138 = 13.8 %	1 Year = 2/138 = 1.5%
Passing 0/4 = 23/138 = 16.7%	

Table 7. Palma ISD /LUCHA Exit Level TAKS Scores 2008-2009

Within the 138 group of students, there were 20 LUCHA students who graduated with the class of 2009. “Two finished high school in two years, one in four, and 17 in three years,” said the ESL counselor in the district.

What did they do right? Several things. One was the carefully planned implementation of the program and the constant supervision of the ESL secondary counselor in the district, Ms Cárdenas.

After having identified the students who could benefit from the LUCHA program, the district requested LUCHA to analyze their transcripts. Counselors who were responsible for these students in the school actually accepted and took this responsibility, hopefully because of their own commitment to the students but because this kind of

caring was cultivated and embraced by the schools. The counselors also received guidance from the district ESL counselor to better devise a plan for each individual student considering the LUCHA courses aligned to the TEKS. No individual was left to flounder alone, and there was someone to turn to in case there were questions or concerns. As a group, the counselors accumulated a body of knowledge which served them in their work with LUCHA students and other ELLs. These students were not seen as problem students, but rather students whose futures could be significantly improved through the efforts of the counselors as well as the teachers.

Because one of the goals is that each ELL student learns English as quickly as possible, the Bilingual department director, Ms Garza, ask each high school to enroll the LUCHA students in the non-credit English as a Second Language (ESL) courses from the LUCHA program for support. This was a difficult proposition, because, understandably, students focus their attention and efforts on courses that are for credit over the ones that are not.

One of the ESL teachers in Palma ISD came up with the idea that they could add four extra points to the final grade of a LUCHA course if the student passed an ESL online course. In this way, students would be motivated to learn English as they simultaneously took LUCHA courses in Spanish. The English courses would strengthen and speed their transition to the all English courses they had to take. Students were excited because they were learning. Some of them were advancing in courses they took for credit and a lot them were making up for courses they had not passed previously. "They could see light at the end of the tunnel," Ms Paz said.

This district created a collaborative atmosphere that encouraged teachers and other personnel to improvise and make new connections. Those ideas that worked were then put into practice.

The LUCHA Club

When the LUCHA staff from UT went to visit Palma ISD during the first year of implementation, they returned to Austin truly motivated. "I could not believe what I was seeing. Our daily work here has a tremendous impact on these students' lives which is very positive," said the LUCHA Coordinator showing a T-shirt with a logo for the LUCHA Club in one of the high schools in Palma ISD. Students had given testimonies to the LUCHA group visiting them on how the LUCHA program was impacting their lives. Prepared to receive a number of guests, they were short by one in the extra LUCHA T-shirts they had prepared to give as gifts. The coordinator ended without a gift, and to his surprise, a student took his own LUCHA shirt and gave it to him. He was moved, not only by this gesture but by the spirit of these ELL students who appreciated the help they were receiving from UT. They all had plans to stay in school and graduate. They were all taking courses during the day and some would go before and after school to continue working in their LUCHA courses.

The idea of forming a LUCHA club had come from a principal who fully supported the program. Students and their LUCHA teacher had activities that fostered the group's identity and sense of belonging to the school. The enthusiastic students had club activities that included fund raising activities, school visits, and social events. Some of these students, who had advanced to 11th grade with LUCHA's aid were taking TAKS

test tutorials offered by the school on Saturdays. They all wanted to pass their TAKS and graduate.

In summing up her philosophy and the reason for LUCHA's success, as well as her personal triumph, Ms Cárdenas' remark expressed her caring for the students, as well as her dedication and hard work. "Ha sido de mucho beneficio para los niños y para todos son numeritos, pero para mi son humanos." (It has been very beneficial to the children, and although for everyone they represent numbers, to me they are human beings.)

Chapter 6: *Findings and Implications*

In this final chapter of my dissertation, I will present my findings and the implications of some of the significant insights and information that was gained from my data. I divide the chapter into several sections and address the topic of opportunities for future research in each section. The last section titled *La Unión Hace la Fuerza* (Unity Makes Us Stronger) serves as the concluding section for this dissertation. My analysis answered the two over-arching questions that guided this study, both of which related to the LUCHA program at The University of Texas at Austin. They were:

> 1. What challenges had to be met in order to initiate and develop the LUCHA program, a binational education program to combat the high dropout rate among Latino immigrants?
>
> 2. What can be learned from the implementation and practice of the LUCHA program in school districts with almost identical homogeneous populations, and different levels of success with the program?

Recapitulation of the Study Process

Often the researcher chooses an object of study significant to him/herself. It is life experience that seems to pull us toward some issues and situations and not to others. I chose to study themes related to a binational experience that relates to education because of my own background. I started to focus on curricular differences that affect immigrant students' success in the United States and found studying the LUCHA program as the perfect case to study. For me, it encompassed not only trying to prevent the worst event in a youth's academic path, which is dropping out before graduating from high school, but the case study included documenting and analyzing how the LUCHA program was

formed and thereby putting the spotlight on a case of binational cooperation on education which I advocate and which is part of a preventative solution to the Latino drop out problem.

This problem needs further research on the local, state, and national levels with an emphasis on successful programs and strategies. This study is a small contribution to this effort. The scope, emphasis, and urgency of academic research must evolve and adapt if it is to result in substantive changes or challenges to the status-quo. Qualitative research and its inclusion of in-depth interviews as well the acceptance of an insider/outsider researcher's stance hold great promise in bringing previously ignored voices into the conversation. I am also very pleased that material in both English and Spanish are admissible as primary sources as this brings the reality of the research field into the academic world.

In order to understand the LUCHA program and to be able to give an accurate account of my research findings, I decided, and in a way I was lucky, to work for LUCHA part time as a graduate research assistant for three years. The length of time I participated in the program allowed me to produce an ethnographic study where I could pick the most relevant data, analyze it, and report my findings in this dissertation.

Knowing and living the LUCHA program, I felt I would give an unfair account of its struggles, failures and accomplishments if I were to only collect data in a single location or from an unexamined researcher's perspective. I decided that the scope of the study was not going to be based on convenience, but rather to regard the formation and practice of the entire LUCHA program itself as a case study. The binational character of

the program made me go to Mexico and to the school districts on the U.S. border during the three years I spent in the program. I also continued to examine the program at times when fellow LUCHA employees considered me an outsider and regarded me with suspicion and confusion.

I felt very fortunate that my research participants opened up to me during their interviews and conversations. I feel confident of the interpretations I made of the data collected in both English and Spanish, since there were no cultural and language barriers to distort them.

The theories I used to examine various facets of the design, planning and practice of the program were those of Cultural Capital, Social Capital and the Theory of Caring. The relationship of these theories to the outcomes of the dissertation findings is quite extraordinary. As a researcher, I thought that I would employ these theories as a way to discuss and examine different elements of the program. I knew that the choice of theories could affect the way the data was perceived (Mertens, 1998), but I never imagined to what extent. As I analyzed the data, I discovered that these same theories turned out to be not only descriptive but prescriptive as well. The same theories that I used to study the program could make the program successful if they were applied in a conscientious way through well crafted innovative program strategies, created by and in turn designed to foster relationships of genuine caring. This was particularly obvious with respect to the delivery of LUCHA services to the ELLs for whom they were designed.

It is also noteworthy that the theories come to the fore in a discussion of the implications of the findings. I suggest that staff at UT, personnel in the school districts

and sites and students and their families likewise be introduced to these theories and encouraged to apply them in order to benefit from their truths. In experiencing this understanding, the role of insider-researcher becomes like the wheel within a wheel. The same insights and methodologies which have broadened and strengthened this qualitative research itself, can empower individuals in all facets of LUCHA's development, delivery and use to see themselves and their activities more clearly and from a position of strength.

Thinking back on the evolution of this dissertation project, I acknowledge that I was reluctant to use one of the theories I employed when I started to analyze my data. After I made observations and interviewed different staff and students in the four districts studied, I just could not explain the different levels of success in the school districts with the same student and staff population. The social capital theory and the cultural capital theory were not sufficient. The research participants in the school districts studied had very similar funds of knowledge so that could not explain the difference in success with the LUCHA program. My data directed me to use the Theory of Caring, but I was reluctant to employ it at first. My struggle became evident as notes in my researcher's journal attest.

> My dissertation supervisor suggests that I should look into the Theory of Caring. I hope I did not offend her by telling her that I found the Theory of Caring weak. For me, the theory of caring is too new, too feminist; it doesn't even sound like a theory. Caring is just naturally good behavior. Why is something so natural even a theory? (Research Journal, May, 2008)

I was wrong, of course. It took me several days before I started researching the Theory of Caring, often called ethics of care. I decided to pick this theory because of my

data findings and not because of a preconceived notion that this theory would be useful in my study. In fact, I can honestly say that the theoretical framework employed in this dissertation emerged during the research through analysis of my data. Although there were several factors that influenced the differences in the levels of success of the program implementation and evolution in school districts with almost identical homogenous populations, the Theory of Caring was a significant determinant in understanding how the LUCHA program evolved in each location.

In conceptualizing, organizing and bringing LUCHA to life, the theories of social and cultural capital were brought to bear in understanding how leaders can acquire and use their influence to bring about needed change. The data revealed leaders who were willing to collaborate and compromise, those who led mighty institutions and those who inspired students whom others had seen as liabilities.

The use of these and other forms of capital to initiate and maintain binational agreements deserve closer and more intense study. I hope to develop further articles on the application of these theories based on the extensive research I undertook for this dissertation. The cultural power of influence, be it government officials with academic institutions, international online course providers with users, a program with its participants, a principal with teachers, a teacher with students, parents with children –all of these relationships and more offer fertile ground for investigation in working to create a positive and productive atmosphere where our immigrant youth can make their way to academic success.

Bicultural Leaders *Valen por Dos*

Throughout this study, a number of leaders have shown through their actions that much can be accomplished, even under the most adverse circumstances. In this study we find leaders at every single level of the initial development and implementation of the LUCHA program. Leaders emerged that spearheaded the negotiations to sign binational agreements of cooperation in education at The University of Texas and at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), at the LUCHA program partnerships with the school districts and at the schools. All are present in this study. Mr. de la Peña, a leader himself in Mexico in both the academic and the political arenas who started the online public education at INEA and led the way to provide government supported education to other countries, explained that for him, a leader is always a champion. He stated that there are four characteristics that must be present for a leader to produce change. They are as follows:

> … buena imagen del campeón. Si voy a poner un campeón, tiene que tener buena imagen. Y luego lo segundo, es darle un buen nivel organizacional… debe tener recursos económicos. Y la cuarta es tener muy buenas ideas. Y las buenas ideas son cosas innovadoras, de mucho impacto y no muy caras. (Interview, June 2007)

> ...The good image of a champion. If I will make (or create) a champion (as a leader), he/she must have a good image. Then, the second thing would be, to give him/her a good organizational level… he must have economic resources. And, the fourth one is that he/she must have very good ideas, And the good ideas, would be innovative, of great impact, and not very expensive.

In a nutshell this description of a leader involves a mixture that includes what the theory of social capital and the networking resources can bring to the table. These

qualities can be attributed to a number of participants whose voices have been heard throughout this dissertation.

For example, the program could not have even existed had it not been for the presence of Dr. Alanis who had the innovative idea to reach his target students' home country for collaboration to provide education with courses produced in the students' home country and in the first language (L1). His good and innovative idea could be carried out with a relatively low cost to school districts. Moreover, his high level network in Mexico could help him ease the process to carry out another great idea he had, that of providing transcript analysis services for foreign Mexican transcripts, which could even be obtained from Mexico if there was a need. His ideas were low cost and saved school districts thousands of dollars, which in practical terms should make funding less difficult than it is for programs that do not at least 'pay their way.' Besides the monetary benefit, his ideas had a very positive impact on ELL Spanish speaking students' academic performance and have a way to expand to national level. Dr. Alanis had credibility in both, Mexico and Texas. People in Mexico trusted him because of himself and the credentials he brought with him. As a former Texas State Commissioner of Education and Associate Dean of the University of Texas at Austin, he had the trust and the institutional support that school districts would seek in academic validation of high school foreign transcripts of recent arrival students. His affiliation with UT provided the financial resources to hire the core personnel at the K-16 education center to bring LUCHA to life.

In Mexico, top government leaders were able to identify the advantage of supporting Alanis' high school program that would help their youth in their host country. The Mexican Minister interviewed from the IME was well aware that the Mexican government could only help through an insider in the U.S. Minister González Gutiérrez said,

> Se necesitaba un 'insider'. Uno como Alanis, con credibilidad y con credenciales… para decir, "Yo ofrezco este servicio de gestoría y de intermediación frente a otros distritos escolares… para que la oferta de México, que es muy útil, se pueda "vender" (entre comillas), se pueda promover entre las autoridades educativas locales." (Interview, February 2008)
>
> An insider was needed (to do it.) One like Alanis, with credibility and credentials… that could say, "I am offering to take the lead in negotiations as an intermediary to offer this educational service to more school districts… so that the Mexico's educational offering, that is very useful, can be "sold," that it can be promoted with the local educational authorities.

At all levels of the program in both Mexico and the U.S., there were leaders involved that made it happen at the beginning of the negotiations, during the program design, development and implementation. At the school level, for example, LUCHA teachers who were recognized as leaders in their own school had a better chance to help more students and achieve better results than teachers who were not. In Valley ISD, Ms Vidaurri was the Spanish Coordinator, had good working relationships with the school counselors, school authorities, and other teachers. She was recognized as a leader in the school and students would seek her out for information about the program and other assistance. She was innovative in working with and around the limitations of the school and district, and found ways to help students acquire what they needed.

On the other hand, Mr. Domínguez, a LUCHA teacher in the same school district in another school, experienced a lack of support from school personnel to the extent that counselors would even block relevant information on his LUCHA students from him. He was not able or equipped to organize those around him and this lack of leadership skills made his situation even more dismal for him and his students.

His difficult experience cries out for future research on the best ways to support individuals who may find themselves in an unsupportive or even hostile environment in their schools or other educational settings in which they are expected to work. Instructors recently arrived form Mexico, for example, may not be fully aware of the anti-immigrant sentiment that can noxiously tinge the way they and their students are treated, when their students are non-English speaking immigrants. These teachers may not realize they are being 'set up' for failure by lack of support, which will in turn may have negative effects on their students. These intricate and often convoluted relationships and attitudes need to be explored so that the best of them can more easily be duplicated and hopefully, the worst of them, be discouraged.

When "My Way" is not "Tu Manera"

This research suggests that while some individuals have acquired the cultural capital to function effectively in two cultures or countries, that knowledge and information is not necessarily a part of the body of knowledge possessed by other individuals and entities of those countries. When individuals and bureaucracies have 'their way of doing things,' it is important to first understand why something is that way before challenging it or objecting to its practice. It is also important to be able to

recognize and acknowledge what seems to be arbitrary from the outside although it is comfortable and normal from the inside. “Different” is not automatically better or worse. It is also important to realize that a culture is not a blanket that covers each person in the same way, and that each individual’s interpretation of that culture will reflect their attitudes.

In order for binational educational agreements to bear fruit, cultural similarities and differences must be acknowledged. Each adjustment made anywhere within LUCHA or any other binational educational program should not characterized or regarded as a power struggle or endorsement or negation of one culture over another. Rather it should be welcomed as an opportunity for collaborative effort that, ideally, is of benefit to both cultures own experience and insight.

In the effort to create a binational educational institution, it is important to not only be mindful of the ‘real’ cultural differences, but also of the climate in each country that could allow negative stereotypes, misperceptions and mistreatment to exist. Dr. Alanis was adamant about combating what he perceived as a wide-spread stereotype that students came from Mexico without academic skills or experience. This was one of his major motivations to start LUCHA. The Mexican government was also eager to show its commitment to Mexicans living in the United States.

The sometimes rabid and seemingly relentless anti-immigrant activities that take place in the United States seem to spill over into attitudes about immigrant students and their education. Young people have no control of their legal status, or in which country

they reside. From the time period which marked the beginning of this investigation through the present, the United States has been far from a welcoming host.

Moving Forward with Imperfections is Better than Standing in Perfect Stillness

On the Mexican side, the vision of Dr. Alanis for a program that would assist Mexican born immigrant U.S. high school students achieve success in their academic endeavors was part of the solution to a government-wide initiative to assist Mexicans "in the exterior." On the United States side, particularly in these times of anti-immigrant fervor, it cannot be said that this kind of commitment to immigrant students is an equally visible and important part of national policy. Although it might be argued that there is a national mandate that all students reach certain quantifiable levels of proficiency, the debate on the best way to achieve that for ELLs continues without a clear national response. Therefore, it was Dr. Alanis' personal expression of this vision, and his ability, through cultural and social capital to advance it, that enabled LUCHA to move from the theoretical to the real.

His decision to situate LUCHA in the K-16 Learning Center of the University of Texas at Austin helped the Mexican educational bureaucracies understand that a highly esteemed and well-established public educational institution would serve as the 'heavy weight' on the United States side to bring this program to life.

The cost-savings to districts in the United States, with respect to credit that was granted through the analysis of transcripts from Mexico also represented an aspect of this united purpose, in that it not only helped the student to move forward in his/her progress towards a high school diploma earned in the United States, but it also granted credibility

to the educational system in Mexico, whose standards are often ignorantly dismissed and ignored.

In this effort to coordinate the disparate elements of two educational systems and their governing bureaucracies, individuals and organizations had to be willing and able to develop new and evolving areas of expertise. It could be argued that the process of transcript analysis, which has proven to be the most widely-used service in the LUCHA portfolio, has necessitated the development of experts at UT LUCHA who are knowledgeable in the requirements of Texas, as put forth by TEA and the ability to examine the content of Mexican transcripts and discern not only the similarities and differences in stated content, but the actual alignment between the two, based on the two systems' differing styles in expressing what a class offers. Likewise, the story of the form that U.S. high schools need to have the student fill out in order to acquire the transcripts, must reflect the Mexican way of naming and identifying individuals in order for the process of transcript acquisition to move forward in a relatively smooth fashion.

This needed attention to detail must be to some degree suspended, in dealing with the current on-line courses from Mexico because they are 'works in progress' with the progress at times uneven and incomplete. Although far from ideal, the courses in their present state can, with the proper support from educational personnel, help students learn vital course content in Spanish as they learn the English language.

Without an adequate, helpful buffer of knowledgeable and vigilant personnel, some of these courses can themselves become sources of frustration for students. A study

on the ways some instructors help their students achieve successful outcomes regardless of limited resource materials is worthwhile studying.

Ms Pereira in Ryan ISD served as an example of a person whose skills and determination overcame, for the most part, obstacles presented by imperfect materials. At the same time, problems with the courses have not gone un-noted on the Mexican side either. There is presently an effort to improve the quality of the courses as well as align them with new and ever-changing requirements put forth by TEA. It seems clear that neither country is advocating or purposefully disseminating material that is clearly flawed, and that human error, while not glorified, is not seen as a reason to reject a plan that has a lot of merit.

Furthermore, my research suggests that the complex tasks of LUCHA and other programs in the K-16 Education Center might be adaptable to regions beyond the areas they now serve. An understanding of what is required to work with various communities, their commonalities as well as their distinctions, could enhance and refine the products that the LUCHA program currently offers. Investigations to discover the best practices in the use of LUCHA services to aid the educational needs of high school English Language Learners could well prove the be the framework to advance the teaching and learning strategies of high school immigrants.

Customer Service for LUCHA

While my data revealed a tenacious dedication on the part of the LUCHA staff at UT to work with Mexican educational bureaucracies and individuals in order to keep the transcript analysis service up-to-date and useful for the students, there were other

instances in which the performance of UT LUCHA staff left room for improvement. While there may not need to be a specific schedule that must be followed by UT LUCHA staff to 'keep in touch' with those individuals in each school and in each district who are the designated "LUCHA people" in their respective institutions, it became clear that the current frequency and consistency of communication is not always effective. When there are problems in the LUCHA program, it is the shared responsibility of the local and UT LUCHA personnel to work together to try to resolve it.

As the data showed, some individuals at the school level may become disheartened and turn away from offered help. This would be less likely to happen if relationships were built that were not formed during times of duress and in which local LUCHA providers felt that there was a genuine interest to share their triumphs as well as challenges. While it is a 'given' that presently there is not sufficient UT LUCHA staff to make scheduled and frequent visits, this imperfect situation can be improved with a vigilant, consistent commitment to the LUCHA providers in the field.

There has been much said about the imperfection of the on-line classes that LUCHA offers to students in the United States. As distance learning and other opportunities brought about by the rapid development of new technologies continue to be options for a growing number of students, the need for binational collaboration in this area becomes even more critical. The problems that face those who develop these materials, their delivery and the mechanism that must be built-in to keep materials current and relevant to students' needs forms another area which, although not investigated in depth in this dissertation, is certainly of interest and a critical research area.

Hispanic Students not to be Blamed

My data analysis suggests that the striking differences in the level of success of the LUCHA program in two schools in the same district serving an identical student population cannot be attributed to the particular Hispanic students' characteristics, but rather on the caring practices of the school staff. Ethics of care or the Theory of Caring was used in this dissertation to understand how the nurturing aspect of care is not always present even when people work and think they are doing the right thing with the carer. The simple act of placing accountability demands at a higher priority than students' needs lowers the opportunities of academic success of individual ELL students. Data shows that when the school district has high expectations on the recent arrival ELL students and creates strategies that would guarantee that no ELL is left behind, they actually perform better in state mandatory high school exit tests (See table 7, p. 167).

When schools and school districts do not place the student first, the message that gets across is that there is lack of care and lack of trust in the individual capabilities of the students. School district and school staff are constantly making decisions that permanently affect the life of their students. Sometimes, a counselor's decision to enroll a student in a certain class instead of another because he/she thinks the student will not make it is enough to let the student know what is expected from him/her. It is no secret to most that students and young people in general react to the expectations of their teachers and authority figures and tend to fulfill them. ELL students are often given the message that because they come from another country where Spanish is spoken, the expectation is that they will not be able finish high school if they did not speak English by the time they

are enrolled in school. Sadly, sometimes immigrant students are not even tested for language proficiency and are placed in 9th grade when the last school they attended was a Mexican school as was the case of a returning student in Hayward high school who had spent the last two years in Mexico before coming back to the U.S.

When ELL Spanish speaking arrivals are misplaced in their grade level and left for semesters and years without learning new math and science material, they forget what they previously knew. This is only natural. Research shows that high school recent immigrants take longer to learn a language through the immersion process than small children and that they cannot afford not having instruction of core courses while they learn the language. Even though the aim of this research is not to prove Virginia Collier's research (1987), we can say that she was right.

After comparing the school practices of four school districts with English language learners using the LUCHA program, it is observable that when students were learning core subjects, in addition to validating their previous studies and trusting that they could do well in the TAKS test even if their English was still in the process of becoming proficient, they can actually bring the AYP score higher to gain even national attention as it was the case in one of the school districts studied.

The fact of being Hispanic, or being low-income or being an immigrant is not to be blamed for high dropout rates or low academic performance. This research indicates that what is to be blamed is the perception of care that school staff has and that is played out in the students' behavior and academic performance.

Orientation and Support for LUCHA Students

The data has demonstrated the impact and pressures of high stakes testing in Texas and their potential to even further marginalize the ELLs that LUCHA serves. In this scenario, students are often seen as recipients of information of pre-determined and inflexible content which is meted out by teachers who, on the one hand are authority figures and on the other, are driven by their own concerns about how their students' 'results' will affect their own careers. This situation is clearly in place in public schools at the present time, with the high stakes TAKS test and other measurements. These conditions have directly affected the potential of LUCHA to successfully serve its target population, in that this population is viewed with trepidation and even disdain by some individuals and districts. This paradigm exemplifies what Freire (1970) calls the "banking method of education."

Under these difficult external circumstances**,** I believe it can be critical for students to understand 'the way things work' for a number of reasons, not the least of which is to combat those attitudes and perceptions which translate into barriers to their success. In an effort to help LUCHA students see their own potential I think it would be beneficial and appropriate to have them made aware of the concepts of 'funds of knowledge,' 'cultural capital,' 'social capital,' and 'culture of caring.' It would be most beneficial if the local providers of LUCHA were the ones who presented these ideas and concepts, which would necessitate their own familiarity with them.

This approach would be a solid and respectful way of helping these students gain and retain their self-esteem which is threatened from many sides. In discussing the needs

of immigrant students, Crandall et al (2008) explains, "Students need opportunities to identify and celebrate their strengths, not focus on their weaknesses" (p.265).

Under the present circumstances, if students were able to situate themselves, their families and their binational communities within these constructs, it would bring new perspective and challenges to the fore. Rather than static concepts, notions of cultural and social capital could be presented in a forum where group discussion is encouraged, and students themselves could make suggestions as to how these ideas could be put into practice in the LUCHA program and their own educational experiences.

This process could serve as a way to integrate their previous educational and cultural experiences and knowledge with their new immigrant life. Although most of these students come with uninterrupted schooling from another school system, meaning they have been well-educated in Mexico, this experience is rarely acknowledged and the students have not been encouraged to either reflect or analyze their past. It would also be interesting for them to view this system through the lens of the aforementioned concepts so that they themselves could pinpoint the similarities and differences they perceive, and perhaps identify what strategies they need to consider to successfully navigate their present educational situation.

This new-found perspective could also help their parents understand what LUCHA is doing and at the same time help the program itself avoid a serious cultural misstep described by Mrs. Pereira in the Ryan school district.

> Even though they did get staff development, it still was not enough. We need to bring the parents in because all of the sudden these children were being taught in Spanish and what did the parents want? They want their

> children to learn English. So that is a lesson learned, and we didn't bring parents in. That is a lesson learned. (Interview, May 2008)

All of this would hopefully place the opportunities and challenges that LUCHA presents in a context that the students and parents would understand in a way that is additive, be supportive and caring. It could also be a good step in the effort to help the students and their families form a working partnership with school personnel rather than feeling marginalized and at the bottom of the pecking order.

Although some LUCHA students like Sheila de la Rosa (Appendix D) make it through the maze of difficulties and are victorious in their struggle to graduate from high school and continue their education, many are not. Another potential way of helping these students would to find mentors who would be able to understand their situation and offer encouragement and practical advice on how to succeed. Bilingual students, some of whom were formerly ELLs, seem to be a logical choice. The student organization BESO (Bilingual Education Student organization) is affiliated with the Texas Association of Bilingual Educators. Its website states its purpose is "to create opportunities for students to exchange ideas, practices and information about bilingual education on a local level." The organization strives to develop support groups, to grow professionally, to network, and to serve the local community through volunteer activities (http://studentorgs.utexas.edu/beso/). There are BESO groups at a number of Texas universities including UT at Austin and UT Pan American. Mentors would provide additional support and encouragement to the LUCHA students could be available both through cyberspace and face-to face meetings.

There are several advantages to finding BESO mentors for LUCHA students. These include the fact that BESO students may be the first in their family to attend college and have gone through adjustments similar to those the LUCHA students are making. The fact that the BESO members are bilingual will mean that they will be a good fit for LUCHA students as they learn English. At UT, the BESO students might provide feedback and information about the LUCHA students that has not been available before, and might be able to problem-solve in an immediate way. BESO students would gain valuable experience that would help them in their understanding of their future students, and lived issues in bilingual education as well. BESO mentors could also serve as an early warning system, if students are beginning to feel isolated or are considering dropping out of school.

Events could be planned in which mentors and students meet and spend time together. It would also be appropriate for LUCHA students to visit the universities of their mentors, who could make the college experience accessible and decipherable to them. They would also see the advantages that await them when they graduate from high school and attend college. The BESO organization has advisors and mentors in the university and they could be part of a committee which could also include the contact person at the LUCHA site. Again, this committee might meet through cyberspace or in person.

Academic Language Proficiency

A recurring and ubiquitous problem in the delivery of LUCHA services is that people who are working with LUCHA students are not in possession of an academic

Spanish which is needed to use the LUCHA services to their best advantage. To an outsider, this may seem like an almost nonsensical statement since South Texas is one of the places where the percentage of Spanish speakers is very high. Simply 'speaking Spanish,' however, does not mean that these individuals, no matter how well-meaning, are able to help ELLs reach the highest levels of educational and language proficiency. Guerrero (1999) states: "…there is little disagreement in the field of bilingual education regarding the importance of teachers who are highly proficient in the Spanish language" (p. 13). While hiring native speakers from Mexico and other Latin American countries is certainly part of the solution, this is not a guarantee of success because teachers need ESL methodologies to bring their ESL students to academic English proficiency. It would be a very personally additive and professionally beneficial experience for U.S. born Chicanos and Latinos to expand their Spanish proficiency. Moreover, it would be a plus to have all teachers with English language learner minorities in their classes receive training in ESL methodologies as part of their annual teacher training courses. At this time, even programs that train bilingual teachers do not necessarily deal successfully with the challenge of developing academic Spanish proficiency. In fact, some otherwise very capable and sincere teaching candidates remove themselves from this career path because they do not think their Spanish is at a level that is most beneficial to their potential students and their families (Prieto, 2009).

Perhaps there could be a pilot program sponsored by LUCHA and nearby universities to offer courses which would remedy this learning gap. It would certainly

serve LUCHA students well, and perhaps serve as a stimulus for a more rapid and widespread expansion of its services.

Future research in this area could support policy-making initiatives. The academic and political communities would benefit from research on teacher training regarding the need to include teacher training in ESL methodologies for teachers who did not intend to be ESL teachers but who have a significant number of ESL students in their classrooms. The same could be said regarding research and the creation of policies which deal with teacher training which would include the acknowledgement and certification of academic Spanish proficiency for teachers who work or plan to work with immigrant Spanish speaking students who have developed their own academic Spanish through their schooling in Mexico.

Implications for Further Study

Although all projects and studies usually have a beginning and end, dissertations can often impose a particularly arbitrary time frame on research. I believe that further study of LUCHA over time could provide rich and detailed information in a number of areas.

As the policies, educational and otherwise, of Mexico and the United States change, their impact on LUCHA and other binational agreements will be felt. Successful strategies for communication and collaboration will perhaps face challenges unknown at this time. These developments should be monitored and evaluated. Likewise, the perspective of key players may shift and adjust as the program changes and this too merits further study.

While this dissertation observed and evaluated the implementation of the LUCHA program at The University of Texas at Austin during the time period of the study, it is yet to be seen whether those programs which have met with success flourish and expand, and whether those which are faltering are able to learn from their challenges. It will also be critical to see whether the support of the UT LUCHA staff can be responsive to the needs of individual programs and can also establish communication that can sustain and improve the quality of existing programs as well as use this information when LUCHA is implemented in new districts and schools. Again, longitudinal studies would be able to identify trends and practices which over time are useful and those which prove to be ineffective.

Although there is a growing awareness of the need for academic Spanish in order to accomplish various educational goals, there needs to be a more comprehensive study of whether colleges and universities, school districts and other educational settings which serve immigrant students or train those who will serve them, have a unified definition of what academic Spanish is. Furthermore, language curricula need to be examined to see whether they meet the needs of those who must attain this standard. The testing which is now in place for Bilingual certification could also be studied to see what level of proficiency is required. This research would be conducted against the backdrop of a national attitude which in the not too distant past prohibited speaking Spanish in schools. Much anti-immigrant sentiment is articulated in arguments against teaching students in Spanish.

Many U.S. born Latinos have a complex relationship with Spanish and an understanding of the intersection of language, culture, identity and education, at the local, state and national levels could bring about an understanding of how best to help families new to the United States as well as those who have been here for generations to partake of the educational opportunities offered and to make those opportunities relevant to the needs of this critical population.

Regarding binational educational programs, this dissertation made clear that there are many details as well as large concepts and patterns of thinking and behavior that come into play when binational agreements are to be achieved. There is still much work and research to be done in understanding the dynamics and nuts-and-bolts construction that makes these agreements function for the benefit of both countries. Studies on binational programs such as the LUCHA program could be studied further through the lens of different theoretical frameworks. The binational effort to reduce the dropout rate implies an ethic of collaboration that could be studied further.

Although the dissertation has primarily discussed the Theory of Caring and ethics of care as they are practiced by individuals, personnel who deliver LUCHA programs and even the schools and districts which define their relationships to the students they serve, there are other implications and possibilities which result from this way of understanding relationships and acting towards others. For example, a natural progression from the ethics of care is the ethics of collaboration. This is a paradigm in which people and institutions collaborate for a common good or cause which benefits others. Although not specifically named, the ethics of collaboration (Buller, Kohls, & Anderson, 1991) can be

discerned in the formation and execution of the binational agreements which formed LUCHA and the day-to-day work of the organization. The ethics of collaboration and its results, as well as what can happen when collaboration does not include this ethical position, is an area that warrants further study.

This could have particular significance in dealing with immigrant students and their families. Many times, benefits to immigrants are tied to policies or practices which either exploit them or inadvertently take advantage of their lack of understanding of a particular system or practice. Were the ethics of collaboration accepted and adopted as the standard for all collaborative endeavors, much would change in the lives of people who are being served by various programs.

La Unión Hace la Fuerza

This dissertation makes evident that the combined effort of two countries to prevent the dropout rate of a shared student population benefits both countries in all aspects. "La Lucha Continúa" was a rallying cry of Latino struggle in the sixties and seventies when one of the most critical, and to many the most critical aspect of the social change people sought and continue to seek, is in the area of education. Although there have certainly been gains in the area of bilingual education, for example, these steps forward are under constant threat. Binational educational efforts like LUCHA are a healthy and productive antidote to the low levels of achievement, and their attendant consequences in the fields of higher education and employment among Latino youth. It is my wish that the younger generation will continue to bolster not only their own academic

strengths, but to recognize potential of growing ties and opportunities for their generation on both sides of the border.

This dissertation brings words of hope. It is my wish that the three countries in North America decide to join forces to bolster regional global strength through education. This dissertation regards research agreements of cooperation in education as a stepping stone to binational collaboration in other arenas. Agreements of collaboration in education such as the ones made for the LUCHA program are just the first step. Future research in educational policy to bolster the education of transnational students, to strengthen the opportunities of immigrant students, and to create stronger ties between the two countries through educating a common student population are needed. It is my hope that this dissertation not only informs, but creates interest and commitment to develop research that could serve to not only strengthen present binational efforts, but also nurture dreams of new ones. I plan to be part of this effort for a very long time.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol sample

Interview protocols were crafted for each research participant. The following is an interview protocol sample designed for Dr. Jaime Arredondo (pseudonym), former Director of *El Colegio de Bachilleres.* Dr. Arredondo was directly involved in the designed and implementation of the first phase of operations of the binational agreement of cooperation between The University of Texas K-16 Education Center and *El Colegio de Bachilleres* to provide Mexican education to U.S. schools.

The interview protocol is in Spanish, the language for this interview.

-=-

Biographical information

1. Biographical information
    a. Jaime, ¿me puedes decir algo sobre ti?
    b. ¿De dónde eres?
    c. Estudios y postgrados
    d. Trabajos y puestos
        i. Antes del Colegio de Bachilleres
        ii. En el Colegio de Bachilleres
        iii. Después del Colegio de Bachilleres

2. En el Colegio de Bachilleres
    a. ¿Cuándo empezó el Colegio con su programa en línea?
    b. ¿Estaba contemplado el mercado norteamericano?
    c. ¿En qué momento empezó a ofertarse el programa en línea a EU?
    d. ¿Quiénes eran sus clientes?
    e. ¿Qué expectativas tenían para los mexicanos en el exterior?
    f. ¿Cómo fue el enlace con el programa LUCHA y UT?
        i. Su inicio – ¿Cómo podrías describir el contexto?
            1. Iniciativas de la política mexicana
            2. Recursos
            3. Contexto histórico
        ii. Desarrollo de la asociación (partnership)

1. ¿que facilitó el desarrollo?
2. ¿que obstáculos recuerdas presentes?
3. ¿qué expectativas se tenían de parte del Colegio de Bachilleres?
4. ¿Eran o son estas asociaciones parte de un plan nacional?

iii. ¿Qué nos puedes decir del desarrollo de los cursos binacionales?
1. ¿Cuándo se idearon?
2. ¿Cómo se desarrollaron?
3. ¿Cómo ves su funcionamiento?
4. ¿Debilidades y fuerzas de estos cursos?

5. ¿Nos podrías hablar un poco del Consorcio Clavijero?
   a. Ahora que estás en el Consorcio Clavijero. ¿Hay una relación entre el Colegio de Bachilleres y el Consorcio Clavijero?

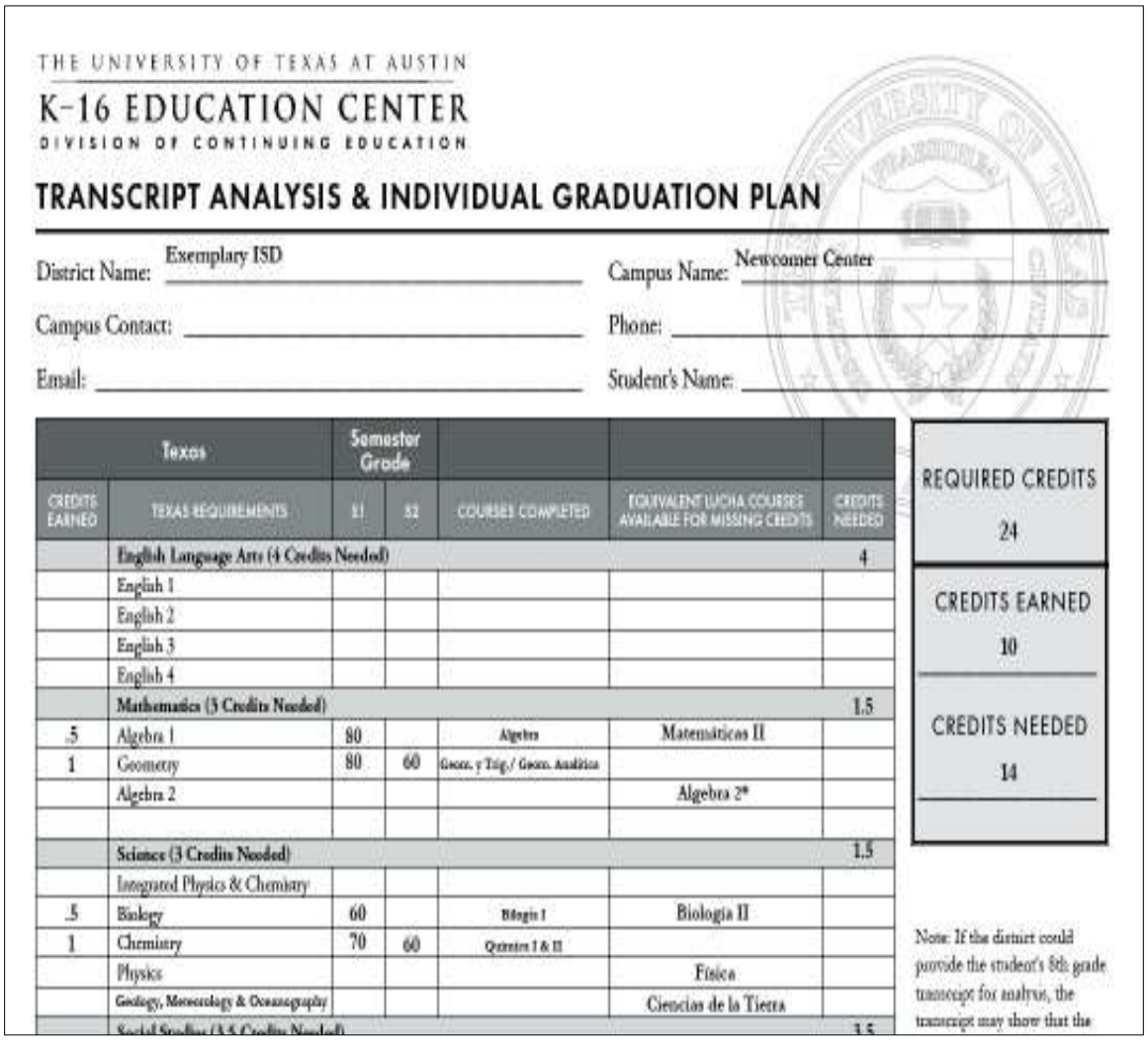
   NOTE: Dr. Arredondo is currently the Distance Education Director for Consorcio Clavijero, a public enterprise from the Mexican state of Veracruz aimed at providing bachelor degrees through distance education programs.

3. ¿Qué expectativas futuras ves para LUCHA en el contexto nacional mexicano?

4. ¿Ves incluido el Consorcio Clavijero en estas expectativas?

5. ¿Cambiará el sistema educativo nacional con estas iniciativas?
   a. ¿Por qué?

Appendix B: Individual Graduation Plan sample



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

K-16 EDUCATION CENTER

DIVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS & INDIVIDUAL GRADUATION PLAN

District Name: Exemplary ISD Campus Name: Newcomer Center

Campus Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____ Student's Name: _____

Texas		Semester Grade				
CREDITS EARNED	TEXAS REQUIREMENTS	S1	S2	COURSES COMPLETED	EQUIVALENT LUCHA COURSES AVAILABLE FOR MISSING CREDITS	CREDITS NEEDED
	English Language Arts (4 Credits Needed)					4
	English 1					
	English 2					
	English 3					
	English 4					
	Mathematics (3 Credits Needed)					1.5
.5	Algebra 1	80		Algebra	Matemáticas II	
1	Geometry	80	60	Geom. y Trig./ Geom. Analítica		
	Algebra 2				Algebra 2*	
	Science (3 Credits Needed)					1.5
	Integrated Physics & Chemistry					
.5	Biology	60		Biología I	Biología II	
1	Chemistry	70	60	Química I & II		
	Physics				Física	
	Geology, Meteorology & Oceanography				Ciencias de la Tierra	
	Social Studies (3.5 Credits Needed)					3.5

REQUIRED CREDITS
24
CREDITS EARNED
10
CREDITS NEEDED
14

Note: If the district could provide the student's 8th grade transcript for analysis, the transcript may show that the

Appendix C: Graduation Credit Analysis Sample

LUCHA™

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
K-16 EDUCATION CENTER
DIVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CREDIT ANALYSIS

Student Name: XXXX ID #: XXXXXXXX Date of Birth: XXXXXXX

District Name: XXXX ISD Campus Name: XX HIGH SCHOOL

CDC# : XXXXXXXXX District/Campus Contact Name:

Phone: Email:

TOTAL CREDITS EARNED
17.5

	TEXAS				Semester Grade		MEXICO	
SCHOOL YEAR	GRADE LEVEL	CREDITS EARNED	TEKS #	TEXAS REQUIREMENTS	S1	S2	COURSES COMPLETED IN MEXICO	RECOMMENDED LUCHA* COURSES FOR CREDIT OR INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT
				English Language Arts				
			03220100	English 1				*Lengua Adicional al Español - Inglés I, II, III*
			03220200	English 2				
			03220300	English 3				
			03220400	English 4				
				Mathematics				
2005-2006	10	1	03100500	Algebra 1	89	89	Matemáticas I	
2005-2006	10	1	03100700	Geometry	76	76	Matemáticas II	
2006-2007	11	1	03100600	Algebra 2	76	72	Matemáticas III & IV	
			03101100	Pre-Calculus				*Cálculo Diferencial e Integral I & II*
				Science				
2004-2005	9	1	03060201	Integrated Physics & Chemistry	92	98	Física/Química	
2005-2006	10	1	03010200	Biology	81	70	Biología I, II, III	
2006-2007	11	1	03040000	Chemistry	78	70	Química I & II	
2006-2007	11	1	03050000	Physics	70	88	Física I & II	
				Social Studies				
			03320100	World Geography				
			03340400	World History				
			03340100	US History				
			03330100	US Government				
			03310300	Economics				Economía I & II
				Health				

Appendix D: LUCHA High School Graduate Student's Essay

Nota: Los nombres de personas y lugares en este ensayo son pseudónimos.

Recuerdo el verano del 2007, acababa de llegar a casa de unos familiares en la ciudad de Ryan, Texas (pseudónimo). Mi mamá y mi hermano vendrían al día siguiente. Mi hermana ya estaba conmigo. Tomar esa decisión no fue fácil, dejar lo que más se quiere, los amigos, la escuela, tu hogar, tus raíces es lo más difícil.

En ese entonces tenía 17 años, ayude a mi mamá en lo que pude ya que era la mayor de tres hermanos. Al contrario de lo que se pueda pensar, mis hermanos Carlos de 12 años en ese entonces y Yolanda de 14 sabían ser responsable y disciplinados, ya que mi mamá a lo largo de nuestras vidas ha sabido educarnos.

Lo principal para ella era que mi hermana y yo obtuviéramos los beneficios de este país por ser ciudadanos de nacimiento. Con esto me refiero a la educación, no ser mantenidos del gobierno.

Como la mayoría sabe, aquí hay más facilidades en lo que a educación se refiere, que en México. Un ejemplo de esto es que no todas las escuelas cuentas con más de un laboratorio de cómputo, como verán compartir es algo que sabemos hacer en ese país.

Al llegar aquí, sabía que venía a enfrentarme con mucos obstáculos que con el tiempo he ido superando al lado de mi familia. El primero fue el lenguaje.

Sin saber hablar inglés, en la escuela no me podían pasar al grado 12 sino en 9, con mi hermana a la que llevo casi 4 años. Fue frustrante: "Si demuestras en un año que puedes, veremos", fueron las palabras del director de la escuela preparatoria de Ryan.

En las clases las cosas fueron un poco mejor a excepción de un pequeño incidente que tuvimos mi hermana y yo con el horario. Como mencioné antes, adaptarse a un nuevo sistema de educación en otro país no era fácil. Puede ser que ahora el horario de una escuela sea cosa de niños pero hubo un momento en el que para nada fue así. Nosotras en México no solíamos tener "even" o "odd days"[6].

Solo fue cuestión de derramar unas cuantas lágrimas por sentirnos ignorantes y confusas (cosa que la verdad odiamos) y mejoramos nuestra actitud hacia nuestros maestros, preguntar.

Recuerdo que PE fue la clase en la que nos confundimos y he ahí mi parte favorita de la historia. En esa clase solo nos presentamos no más de tres semanas. No, no éramos de las que les encanta perder el tiempo fuera de las clases. Llegó entonces, una gran ayuda a las dificultades que nos enfrentábamos.

Language Learners at the UT Center for Hispanic Achievement: LUCHA. Este programa al principio no me llamaba la atención hasta que se me explicó de qué se trataba. No era un programa para que aprendieras el inglés casi forzadamente, se trataba de "luchar".

Al principio pensé "que bien, computadoras" pero no pasó mucho para darme cuenta que esas computadoras me estaban dando un gran privilegio, podía ser mi propio maestro.

El concepto era bueno, podía acabar hasta dos clases (si son de un semestre) según mi ritmo de trabajo. Todo dependía de que tanto entusiasmo pusiera en lo que hacía. El primer año escolar (07-08) se aligeró para mi hermana y para mí, te sentías como en una burbuja en la que cualquiera podía entrar pero sin tocarte.

[6] Nota del autor: "even days" se refiere a los días del calendario con número par, y "odd days" se refiere a los días con número impar. Esto se utiliza para definir horario de clases en algunas escuelas en los Estados Unidos como hace referencia el ensayo en el horario de la clase de Educación Física (Physical Education – P.E.)

Ese año fue la materia de Biología la que mi hermana y yo tomamos para esa clase, en español. Esa era la mejor parte. Cuando el año estaba por terminar comenzaron las especulaciones y los "el próximo año voy a ser *Senior*".

En mi situación, era un poco difícil, pero fue gracias a la revalidación de créditos que el programa tenía lo que me ayudó. Recuerdo que mi maestro me dijo "traiga sus calificaciones de México" eso fue casi a mediados de año y tardé una semana en traerlas, pero aun así, me revalidaron los suficientes créditos para poder pasar de año pero, "Oh, sorpresa"

Había algo mas requerido para lograr la meta que me impuse, graduarme al segundo año de estar en esa escuela. Si bien el propósito de esa meta fui víctima de burlas por parte de mis compañeros o incluso el "yo creo que no" de algunos maestros, eso no me detuvo.

El haber sido parte de ese programa, mis ganas y el apoyo de mi familia (sin dejar de lado que dios pelea por sus hijos) fue lo que borró cualquier duda, miedo o frustración de mi cabeza. El último mes de clases hablé con mi consejera, "¿Qué opciones o qué tengo que hacer par graduarme el próximo año?" Recuerdo como si hubiera sido ayer, de verdad. "Mmm… pues los créditos para 12 los tienes pero solo tienes 1 de Inglés y necesitas al menos dos para que el próximo año, en caso de que se acepte, lleves Inglés 3 y 4 al mismo tiempo."

"¿Pero puedo venir en verano y hacer el crédito?", esa era una de las especulaciones. "De hecho sí, ahora algo más, otro "obtáculo" estaba por venir, "Te faltan las clases de historia (eran cuatro para ser exactos) Y creo que es muy apresurado y tal vez sea mucha…"

¿Eso es lo que necesito? ¿Si hago el crédito de Inglés en verano, tomo las clases que me faltan y las paso puedo graduar? Mi consejera me miraba un poco incómoda así que me disculpé por interrumpirla. "Sí pero hay otra cosa, los TAKS y si el próximo año eres "*Senior*" tendrías que pasarlos en solo unas cuantas oportunidades, por lo mismo creo que es mejor que se te ponga en grado 10 / 11 y te graduarías hasta el siguiente año".

"Sé que su meta es que los estudiantes tomen la mejor decisión para ellos y créame, mi mejor decisión es tomar el curso de Inglés en verano, las dos clases juntas regulares (Inglés 3 y 4), las cuatro materias sobre Historia restantes y pasar los TAKS, el próximo año para graduarme.

Era tal mi determinación que convencí a mi consejera e incluso me preparé el horario para el siguiente año con las clases que tenía que pasar. Lo mandó al director para ver si se aceptaba.

Llegó el verano y fue un verano prácticamente en la escuela; junto con mi hermana, conseguimos el crédito de Inglés y era cuestión de esperar para saber si logramos lo que queríamos, ella estar en grado 11 y yo en 12.

Al entrar, hablamos con nuestra consejera y nos reafirmó a lo que me podía enfrentar ese año si quería graduar, lo acepté y ya era entonces toda una cursante del grado 12. ¡El director había aceptado!

No fue fácil pero tampoco imposible, mis grados en las clases de Historia (World History, U.S. History, Government) y *Economics* en LUCHA eran buenos.

Esa era la clave "LUCHA" por lo que quieres lograr, "LUCHA" por las oportunidades que se te dan.

Hoy puedo decir que mis TAKS fueron tal vez lo más difícil de estos dos años pasados, como lo mencioné antes, ya que en octubre del 20008 los presenté y solo pasé dos, la segunda oportunidad vino en marzo del 2009 y ahí conté con todo el apoyo de una maestra que admiré y respeto, Lorena Saldívar. Ella me ayudó a estudiar para el TAKS de Science, uno de los más difíciles para mí, ya que no había tenido muchas clases sobre esa materia, solo Biología pero en español y en México igual. No sabía gran cosa pero lo bueno de esta vida es encontrarse con personas que están dispuestas a ayudar a nosotros, los recién llegados.

Afortunadamente, hoy puedo decir que soy de la generación 2009 de Ryan High School; que a pesar de las desventajas y los "tal vez no" fui la número uno en las clases de World History y U.S. History (las tan temidas clases de Historia) este año, que gracias a muchos logré lo que me había propuesto. Si hiciera una lista de agradecimiento no cabrían todas las palabras que

tengo que decirles a todos esos maestros con vocación, que están ahí para realizar lo mejor que tienen: Enseñar y Guiar.

Hoy mis logros no son sólo míos, son de mi familia, de mis amigos y del Creador que nos dio entendimiento y sabiduría para desarrollarnos en un mundo de aprendizaje.

Hoy como alguien que ha aprendido a sobrellevar las cosas y no dejarse vencer, solo puedo decir: Dí adiós al "yo no puedo", dí adiós al "qué difícil" y dile "¡Hola" a las oportunidades que se te dan. Aprende a dar las gracias y hazte acompañar de la LUCHA a enfrentar, en cada día.

Translation of the LUCHA High School Graduate Student's Essay
(Note: all people's names are pseudonyms)

I remember the summer of 2007; I had just arrived at the home of one of my relatives in the city of Ryan, Texas (pseudonym). My mom and my brother would arrive the following day. My sister was already with me. It wasn't easy to make the decision, to leave what one loves the most, friends, school, your home, your roots; that is the most difficult.

At that time I was 17 years old; I helped my mom with what I could because I was the oldest of three children. Contrary to what one might think, my brother Carlos who was 12 at the time and my sister Yolanda who was 14 knew how to be responsible and disciplined, because throughout our lives my mom had known how to educate us.

The main thing for her was that my sister and I receive the benefits of this country because we were born here; we're citizens by birth. And with this I am referring to education, not being supported by the government.

As most people know, there are more opportunities here with regard to education than in Mexico. One example of this is that not all the schools have more than one computer lab. As you can see, sharing is something we all know how to do in that country.

When I arrived here, I knew that I would confront many obstacles that with time I have overcome with my family at my side. The first was the language.

I couldn't be placed in 12th grade because I did not know how to speak English. Instead I was placed in 9th grade, with my sister who was 4 years younger than I. It was frustrating: "If you demonstrate in one year that you can do it, then we'll see" were the words of the high school principal in Ryan ISD.

In the classes, things went a little better with the exception of a small incident that my sister and I had with the schedule. As I mentioned before, adapting to a new education system in a new country wasn't easy. The school schedule may seem like baby stuff but there was a time when it did not seem that way at all. In Mexico we didn't count days as "even" or "odd."

It was only a matter of shedding some tears for feeling dumb and confused (feelings that we truly hated) and we improved our attitude about asking our teachers questions.

I remember that PE was the class that confused us (with the schedule) and here is my favorite story about that. In that class we were only present for no more than three

weeks. No, it wasn't that we were the ones that loved to waste time out of class. Then, a big help for the difficulties that confronted us arrived.

Language Learners at the UT Center for Hispanic Achievement: LUCHA. At first, I didn't really notice this program until it was explained to me what it was all about. It wasn't a program for learning English by force; it was about "struggling/fighting."

At first I thought "how great, computers," but not a lot of time passed before I realized that those computers were providing me with a great privilege, I could be my own teacher.

The concept was good; I could finish up to two classes (if each was of one semester's duration) at my own pace. Everything depended on how much enthusiasm I put towards what I was doing. The first school year (07-08) went quickly for my sister and me, I felt like if I were in a bubble where anybody could come in, but no one could touch me.

That year my sister and I took Biology for that class (the LUCHA class), in Spanish. That was the best part. As the school year was ending the expectations began of "next year I'm going to be a Senior."

In my situation, it was a little difficult, but it was thanks to the validation of credits that the program had that I received the most help. I remember my teacher told me "bring your grades from Mexico"; that was almost in the middle of the school year and it took me a week to bring them, but even then, they gave me sufficient credits to be able to pass to the next school year. But, Oh! There was another surprise.

There was something else I needed in order to achieve the goal I had set for myself –to graduate the second year that I was at that school. Because of this goal, I was the victim of my friends' jokes, including the "I don't think so's" from some teachers, but that didn't hold me back.

Having been part of this program, my efforts and the support from my family (without forgetting that God fights for his children) was what erased any doubt, fear or frustration from my head. The last month of classes I spoke with my counselor, "What options or what do I have to do to graduate next year?" I remember as if it were yesterday, really. "Well...you have the credits for 12th grade but you only have only one English credit and you need at least 2 for next year, in the case that this is accepted, you can take English 3 and 4 at the same time."

"But, can I come in the summer and take the credit?" I asked speculatively. 'If it's not one thing, it's another,' (as expected) another "obstacle" arose. "You lack the History classes (there were 4 to be exact) and I think that's a lot of pressure and that's maybe too much..."

That's what I need? If I get the English credit in the summer, I take the classes that I'm missing and I pass them I can graduate? My counselor looked at me a little uncomfortably and I apologized for interrupting her "yes but there is something else, the TAKS and if next year you're a "Senior," you'll only have a few opportunities to pass them. That's why I think it's better if I put you in 10th / 11th grade and you would graduate the following year."

"I know that your goal is that students make the best decision for themselves and believe me, the best decision for me is to take the English class in the summer, the two

regular classes at the same time (English 3 and 4), the four remaining History courses and pass the TAKS next year in order to graduate."

It was my determination that convinced my counselor and she prepared my schedule for the next year with the classes I had to pass. She sent it to the principal to see if it would be approved.

The summer arrived and it was practically a whole summer spent in school; together with my sister we earned the English credit, and it was a question of waiting to know if we had achieved what we wanted –she wanted to be in 11th grade, and I wanted to be in 12th grade.

We went in and talked to our counselor, and she reaffirmed what I would have to do that year if I wanted to graduate. I agreed to it and I was a 12th grader: The principal had approved!

It wasn't easy but it wasn't impossible either. My grades in the History classes (World History, US History, Government and Economics in LUCHA) were good.

That was the key "LUCHA (FIGHT)" for what you want to achieve, "LUCHA" for your goals and your dreams, so that they become a reality; "LUCHA" so you don't get left behind and "LUCHA" for the opportunities you are given.

Today I can say that my TAKS were perhaps the most difficult challenge of the last two years. As I mentioned before, in October 2008 I took them and I only passed two. The second opportunity came in March 2009 and for that I'll tell you about all the support I received from a teacher that I admire and respect, Lorena Saldívar. She helped me study for the Science TAKS, one of the most difficult ones for me, because I hadn't had many classes in that subject; I had only taken Biology in Spanish and in Mexico. I didn't know much (on the subject), but something good in this life is meeting people who are ready to help us, the recent immigrants.

Fortunately, today I can say that I am from the graduating class of 2009 of Ryan High School; that despite the disadvantages and the "maybe nots" I was number one in the classes in World History and US History (the dreaded History classes) this year, that thanks many people that helped me, I accomplished what I had set to achieve. If I were to make a list of acknowledgements to include all who have helped me, I would not be able to fit in it all the words I should say to all those teachers by vocation, that are here to bring out the best they have: To teach and to guide.

Today my achievements aren't only my own, but they're my family's, my friends' and the Creator that gave us understanding and wisdom in order to develop in us a world of learning.

Today, as someone that has learned to overcome obstacles, and not let them defeat me, I can only say: Say goodbye to "I can't," say goodbye to "that's too hard" and say "Hello!" to the opportunities that you're given. Learn to give thanks and make yourself be present in the LUCHA you face, every single day.

Glossary

AYP
http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/ayp/2009/
Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is measure to assess the academic performance for school districts and campuses as required under the U.S. federal accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

ELL
English language learner

LEP
http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=4537
Limited English Proficient (LEP)

ESL
English as a second language

INEA
http://www.inea.gob.mx/
INEA (*Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos*) is the National Institute for Adult Education

IME
http://www.ime.gob.mx/
IME (*Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior*) is the Institute of Mexicans Abroad. It is a decentralized agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was formed in April 2003 by presidential decree. The IME carries out the functions of the Presidential Office for Mexican Communities Abroad and the Mexican Communities Abroad Program. It has an Advisory Board made up of 152 members who are representatives of the Mexican and Mexican-American community in the United States.

IPN
IPN (Instituto Politécnico Nacional) is the National Polytechnic Institute

PEIMS
http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/peims/standards/index.html
PEIMS (Public Education Information Management System) is a data collection system developed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (HB 72 of 1984 - http://fisd.us/Alternative/PEIMS/PEIMSHB72.htm to provide a single system for collecting school district information and to maintain the information in one common coordinated database for accountability. PEIMS is the primary method by which school

districts in the state of Texas deliver data to TEA. Reports are generated to properly oversee education.

SACS
http://www.sacs.org/
The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is a regional education accreditation agency for over 13,000 private and educational institutions. SACS is one of six regional accreditation organizations recognized by the United States Department of Education.

SEP
www.sep.gob.mx
SEP (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) is the Mexican Ministry of Education.

SRE
http://www.sre.gob.mx/
SRE (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*) is the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

TAKS (TAKS™)
http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3693&menu_id3=793
Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS™)

TEKS
http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=6148
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills are the academic standard guidelines set by the Texas Education Agency to provide education in the Texas public school system.

TEA
http://www.tea.state.tx.us/
Texas Education Agency

TRALCOM
http://www.tralcom.com
TRALCOM is the acronym of Transaction Language Company, S.A. de C.V., which is an E-Learning Content Carrier company. In Mexico, *Colegio the Bachilleres* partnered with TRALCOM to provide distance education within Mexico and abroad.

UNAM
http://www.unam.mx/
UNAM (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)* is the Mexican Autonomous National University

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